

Why Nevada is a lottery-free state

By David McGrath Schwartz, Las Vegas Sun

Watching Nevadans form long lines across the California border last week, hoping to strike it rich gambling, would seem akin to Idahoans emigrating for potatoes or Wisconsinites taking a road trip for cheese. Gambling is, more than anything else, supposed to be Nevada's franchise.

But California offers something Nevada doesn't: lottery tickets.

Record lottery ticket sales of \$1.5 billion last week for a jackpot of \$640 million once again raises the question of why Nevada doesn't participate in a lottery.

"Nevada is sending people out of state to gamble," said Assemblyman Paul Aizley, D-Las Vegas, who authored a resolution in 2009 to change the state's constitution. "That, to me, is crazy."

Casinos see it differently. A lottery in Nevada would be, in their mind, competition.

The Nevada Constitution has prohibited lotteries since it was ratified in 1864. Over the past 30 years, efforts to change that have been squashed by the gaming industry at the Legislature. (Voters did change the constitution in 1990 to allow charitable groups and not-for-profits to hold small lotteries – think church raffles.)

Since 1975, the Legislature has considered a lottery resolution almost every session to start the ball rolling on a five-year process to amend the constitution. It has yet to pass.

A lottery in Nevada would bring in between \$30 million and \$50 million a year, according to one Legislative analysis done in 2005. Another study, by the Governor Kenny Guinn's Task Force on Tax Policy, estimated in 2002 that it would net the state \$40 million to \$70 million a year.

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