

Opinion: GOP platform hurts Nevada

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

One of the reasons so many people hate politics is that well-meaning leaders often do more harm than good when they try to legislate public policy.

The Republican Party's attempt to protect people from themselves by pledging to oppose online gambling illustrates that point, and it could ultimately result in negative consequences for Nevada's tourism industry.

Nevada gaming professionals and government leaders worked diligently to deliver thoughtful online poker policies, draft regulations and begin issuing licenses. But the GOP platform stands in the way of triggering play on a scale that would benefit our state.

The state is counting on some form of federal online gaming legislation to be approved for nationwide online poker play. And although the state Gaming Control Board and Nevada Gaming Commission are making a good first step issuing licenses for intrastate play, Nevada simply doesn't have the number of players needed to make online poker a game-changer.

The presumed next step would be to add players by developing compacts with other states and finding a way to share tax revenue with them. But the GOP platform is a new impediment.

Adopted at the Republican National Convention in Tampa, Fla., under the category of "Making the Internet family-friendly," the platform states: "We support the prohibition of gambling over the Internet and call for reversal of the Justice Department's decision distorting the formerly accepted meaning of the Wire Act that could open the door to Internet betting."

It is hard to say what effect legalizing Internet poker would have on Nevada's casino industry. Some say it would drive people out of casinos and onto their computers to play. Others say online poker represents an opportunity to increase player volume because online competition builds a bigger pool of gamblers who eventually will want to experience live play in a casino poker room.

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