

Senate likely to fold on online poker

By Karoun Demirjian, Las Vegas Sun

It's sad times for online poker in the Senate.

A few months ago, Nevada Sens. Harry Reid and Dean Heller were talking big about the Internet poker bill they would be sure to pass before the year was out.

Now they are hinting, in noticeably deflated tones, that a big poker bill may once again be a political impossibility.

Heller and Reid blamed different political forces of nature Tuesday for stymieing their best efforts to get a bill legalizing online poker onto the Senate's agenda.

Poker "is an issue that's on the front burner for me, for Sen. Reid and Sen. Kyl," Heller said Tuesday. "The front burner for everybody else is this rules package and the fiscal cliff ... it's just hard getting it to the forefront so that we can make it an issue and get it moving."

"I said on a number of occasions that to bring an Internet poker bill to come to the floor you need 15, 17 Republican votes," Reid said Tuesday. "At this stage, we've gotten none."

Reid and Heller promised to bury the hatchet after the elections and work together to get a bill that would roll back the Department of Justice's reading of the 1961 Wire Act to render all forms of interstate gambling online illegal, save for poker, and regulate the internet poker market. The legislation, which exists presently in draft form, is seen as hugely beneficial to the Nevada gaming industry.

Two years ago, Reid tried unsuccessfully to work legislation mainstreaming online poker into a tax compromise bill.

Now once again, a bill to regulate taxes and spending – the much-anticipated but ever-elusive legislation to avoid the fiscal cliff – likely provides the best potential vehicle to get poker language going through the Senate.

But doing so requires the support of at least 60 members of the Senate, so that members can be sure they could avoid a filibuster.

Prior to the election, Reid and his staffers stated that he expected Heller to corral 15 Republicans and bring the poker bill over the finish line.

That number appeared to inch up slightly on Tuesday, as Reid hearkened back to the deal as requiring Republicans to pony up “15, 17” votes.

Reid’s staffers have estimated they have approximately 45 votes for an online poker bill on the Democrats’ side of the aisle.