



Click to copy

# Florida OKs sports betting operated by Seminole Tribe

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON and BOBBY CAINA CALVAN May 19, 2021



TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — The Seminole Tribe would be able to operate sports betting and add roulette and craps to its casinos and Florida would potentially receive \$20 billion over the next 30 years, under an agreement the Legislature approved Wednesday.

The House voted 97-17 to approve a gambling compact that Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis and the tribe signed last month. The Senate approved it Tuesday. It still needs to be approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior, which oversees tribal gambling operations, and even lawmakers supporting the deal expect legal challenges.

“It is a good deal for our state,” said Republican Rep. Randy Fine. “Could we get a better deal? I don’t know. I’d like to think I could, sure. But I don’t have that choice. I have this deal and a closer path to a million and half dollars a day.”

Democrats opposing the bill argued that the compact violates Amendment 3 passed by voters in 2018. The amendment to the state constitution prevents the expansion of gambling outside of tribal lands without voter approval. Opponents questioned whether the compact will survive a legal challenge.

“What ever happened to Amendment 3?” asked Democratic Rep. Anna Eskamani. “I thought that moving forward, the voters would approve any type of expansion of gambling.”

ADVERTISEMENT

The approval is a victory for DeSantis. His predecessor, now Sen. Rick Scott, signed a deal with the Seminole Tribe in 2015 to allow craps and roulette, but it never received legislative approval.

In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federal law that barred states from authorizing sports betting. Since then, about a dozen states have legalized the activity, with more states poised to enact similar laws.

Under the agreement, the Seminoles could begin sports betting Oct. 15 and sports wagering at horse tracks, jai alai frontons and former dog tracks for a share of the income. Online sports betting operated by the tribe also would be allowed.

Critics of the compact assert that it violates the state constitution, partly because bets on sports can be made off tribal land. Supporters argued that because the servers that process bets would be located on property owned by the Seminole Tribe, it would be legal.

“The Legislature is not the final say on this matter,” said John Sowinski, the president of No Casinos, which won passage of Amendment 3 in 2018. “This compact is more of a buffet for gambling interests than sound policy for the state.”

The Interior Department has 45 days to consider whether to let the agreement proceed.

House Speaker Chris Sprowls acknowledged that legal challenges are forthcoming, considering the size and scope of the agreement.

“Obviously, having this kind of agreement, you’re navigating kind of the icebergs or legal hurdles,” he told reporters after the compact’s passage.

Lawmakers approved the deal during a special session held just more than two weeks after they ended their annual 60-day session.

Florida’s original compact with the Seminoles gave the tribe exclusive rights to slot machines and blackjack. In exchange, the tribe paid the state several billion dollars. Payments stopped in 2019.

The Legislature also sent DeSantis a bill that would create a gaming commission to regulate pari-mutuels and investigate illegal gambling in the state.

Another bill going to the governor would allow jai alai frontons, dog tracks and a harness racing track in Miami-Dade and Broward counties to keep operating slots and card rooms without holding live events. Other pari-mutuels in the state would be able to continue operating card rooms without live events, with the exception of thoroughbred horse tracks, which would have to hold live racing.

ADVERTISEMENT



**AP NEWS**

[Top Stories](#)

[Video](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Cookie Settings](#)

**DOWNLOAD AP NEWS**

Connect with the definitive source for global and local news



**MORE FROM AP**

[ap.org](#)

[AP Insights](#)

[AP Definitive Source](#)

[AP Images Spotlight](#)

[AP Explore](#)

[AP Books](#)

**FOLLOW AP**



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

[About](#) [Contact](#) [Customer Support](#) [Careers](#) [Terms & Conditions](#)  
[Privacy](#)

All contents © copyright 2021 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

