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BUSINESS COURIER

Wednesday, July 1, 2009, 2:27pm EDT | Modified: Wednesday, July 1, 2009, 9:04pm

Ohio Senate to hold hearings on slots plan

Business Courier of Cincinnati

The head of the Republican-controlled Ohio Senate has agreed to host public hearings Thursday to discuss Gov. Ted Strickland's proposal to install video slot machines at the state's horse-racing tracks to help plug a \$3 billion hole in the state budget.

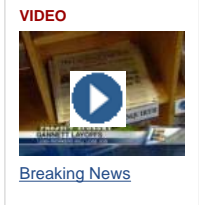
Senate President Bill Harris, R-Ashland, said Wednesday that hearings on Strickland's proposal will be led by a five-member panel chaired by Sen. Mark Wagoner, R-Toledo. Harris has opposed to Strickland's proposal to move forward with the slot machines, saying any gambling measure should be put to a public vote. The hearings, he said, are intended to help legislators better understand the proposal.

In a statement Wednesday, Harris said he continues to believe "the voters of Ohio should have the say," but a chief concern is what he called a lack of details on the proposal. Harris said he wants to know how the Strickland administration arrived at a projection that the gambling plan would bring in more than \$900 million over two years and what will happen to school funding if revenue falls short.

"The governor demands that legislators vote to allow him to expand gambling," Harris said. "How can the governor expect anyone to support him if we don't even know what his plan actually is?"

A Strickland spokeswoman couldn't be immediately reached for comment Wednesday afternoon.

The stalemate between Strickland and Senate Republicans over the gambling proposal has tied up finalization of the state's budget for the two years started Wednesday. That budget was due to Strickland by Tuesday, but the state instead is operating under an interim spending plan as the slots debate plays out. The Democrat-controlled state House of Representatives has proposed another seven-day budget that would cover state operations through July 14.



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