

DELEO: GAMBLING BILL LIKELY OUT IN TWO TO THREE WEEKS, DEBATE IN LATE MARCH OR EARLY APRIL

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| House Speaker Robert DeLeo said a bill sanctioning expanded gambling in Massachusetts is likely to be released in a "two- or three-week period" and that the House would likely debate it in late March or early April. DeLeo said the House doesn't intend to include gambling revenue in its budget, noting that even if the bill passes the House, it must clear the Senate and win the governor's approval. He said that in his time as House Ways and Means Chairman, he learned "not to spend money that you don't have." Senate President Therese Murray, standing alongside DeLeo during an afternoon press availability, agreed that gambling revenue shouldn't be included in the budget. "It wouldn't be a wise thing to do," she said, adding that a "regulatory authority" to police new gambling enterprises couldn't be set up in time. During the avail, Murray's budget chief Steven Panagiotakos said municipal leaders forced the demise of a compromise aimed at increasing cities' and towns' authority to design employee health insurance plans while retaining employee union input. "The unions actually have moved on that issue," Panagiotakos said. "It was the MMA" -- the Massachusetts Municipal Association that advocates for municipal government leaders -- "who basically wouldn't move from where they were, which was unilateral plan design," which would cut unions out of the process. DeLeo said he'll check with House members Tuesday to see whether the resignation of Rep. William Lantigua, who now serves as mayor of Lawrence, made them more amenable to passing a bill to enable the cash-strapped city to borrow \$35 million into deficit. DeLeo said he didn't think receivership would be necessary to get the city out of its financial doldrums, but added, "I think it does require some strong oversight by someone just to make sure that the bills are getting paid and they're headed in the right direction." House Republicans have demanded that the city be subject to a state finance control board, which would manage city finances.