

# Online poker advocates lobby Congress to lift federal ban

July 22 2009, By Carrie Wells

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Poker players are gambling on Congress seeing things their way.

Advocates for legalizing online poker have descended on Washington this week for a lobbying blitz that's supposed to last until Friday. They're betting they can overturn or at least ease federal laws that generally bar Internet [gambling](#).

They're seeking regulation of Internet gaming, a change they say would reduce compulsive and underage gambling, according to John A. Pappas, the executive director of the Poker Players Alliance, whose slogan is "Poker is Not a Crime."

Members of his organization plan to meet with 100 members of Congress from 35 states this week and were to host a charity poker tournament Tuesday night benefiting the USO and the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. They've enlisted the help of famous poker players such as Annie Duke, Andy Bloch and Howard Lederer.

Among those pushing legislation is Rep. Barney Frank, D-Mass., the chairman of the House Financial Services Committee, who sees the measure as consumer protection and a potential source of revenue, since winnings could be taxed.

Pappas kicked off the lobbying effort Monday by hosting a panel to promote the benefits of lifting the gambling ban. Many American poker players have been getting around the ban since it was instituted in 2006

by using sites based in the Caribbean or the United Kingdom. The sites make up more than a third of all online [poker](#) players.

However, Rep. Spencer Bachus of Alabama, the top Republican on the House committee, condemned the gambling legislation in the works. Bachus helped write the 2006 bill, which made it illegal for banks or credit card companies to process money earned through online gambling, although it doesn't specifically define online gambling.

Bachus, in a statement, said he'd continue to support efforts to discourage online gambling.

"Illegal off-shore Internet gambling sites are a criminal enterprise, and allowing them to operate unfettered in the United States would present a clear danger to our youth, who are subject to becoming addicted to gambling at an early age," he said. "In fact, studies have shown that earlier one begins [gambling](#), the more likely it is he or she will become a compulsive problem gambler."

Regulation, however, wouldn't only protect children by instituting age identifying software, but also would keep players from being defrauded by shady sites or other players, Pappas and other panelists said.

"I really see this as a consumer protection issue," said Parry Aftab, who was on Monday's panel and serves as the executive director of Wired Safety, an Internet safety charity organization. Online [poker](#) players "can't go to the (Federal Trade Commission) and say 'someone defrauded me.' You can't get any help," she said.

Pappas, whose organization has spent \$400,000 in the past three months alone on lobbying efforts, agreed.

"It's a marketplace based on trust," Pappas said. "There is no business if

people don't trust them. It's a bottom-line business issue that they have the safest, securest site out there."

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