

GAMING

# Online poker: When will California have part of the deal?

Michael Shapiro | January 1, 2014

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The past year has seen the re-emergence of online poker in Nevada, New Jersey and Delaware, and some legal experts say California won't be far behind.

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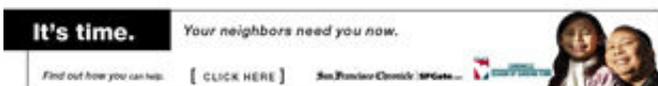
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"I don't have any doubt we'll have legal online poker in California," says Whittier Law School Professor I. Nelson Rose, a specialist in gambling law. "Only politics is preventing it."

By politics he primarily means Indian tribes that wield immense influence in Sacramento and are said to believe most legal online gambling could reduce the number of people playing in casinos. He notes the state already allows remote online betting on horse races. "The tribes have done a tremendous job of using the wealth generated from gaming to gain political power," he says.

Rose says the state's need for increased tax revenue will drive it to legalize Web-based poker. Given that 2014 is an election year, he says he expects the state to approve some type of online poker format in 2015.

Some history: In April 2011, the U.S. government shut down three of the largest online poker sites - Full Tilt, PokerStars and Absolute Poker. In late 2011, the Department of Justice gave states authority to offer legal online gaming within their borders. In 2010, Nevada, New Jersey and Delaware were within state



Jeff Ibrah, a Washington, D.C., attorney who specializes in gaming law, says the lack of problems in other states will encourage California to approve some type of system. "There haven't been any incidents where someone has accessed the system and actually played the game from outside of those three states, as far as I know," he said.

Ibrah says that if California does allow online gaming, the state could reap great benefits. "California coming online would dwarf any success that those other markets had," he said.

Richard Schuetz of California's Gambling Control Commission says the state will consider online poker but not other games because those could pose a threat to tribes that invested heavily in Indian casinos with the promise of limited competition.

"I think there's a belief among our tribal partners that the Internet as a distribution network for gambling products could in some ways cannibalize the brick-and-mortar environment," Schuetz said in an interview with OP Report.

But Ibrah disagrees: Tribes believe "there are only so many pieces to the gaming pie. ... But I don't think that's the way it works. It's not like opening another casino across the street. Online gaming can actually generate new foot traffic for land-based casinos."

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