

Bill lets council lower tax on slots

Measure would affect Fair Grounds

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By Ed Anderson

BATON ROUGE -- The New Orleans City Council would have the authority to lower a 4 percent tax on slot machine revenue at the Fair Grounds to 2 percent for the next six months under a bill that cleared the Senate Judiciary B Committee on Tuesday.

Senate Bill 689 by Sen. Edwin Murray, D-New Orleans, whose district includes the racetrack, now heads to the Senate floor for debate. Fair Grounds lobbyist Jim Harris said the bill allows a transition tax rate from a temporary slots facility that opened in September until a month after a permanent facility opens, probably in November.

Harris said the temporary slots facility has 245 machines. The permanent facility will have 700. Thirty days after the permanent facility opens, the tax would go back to 4 percent.

Murray's bill also provides that one-half of the tax collections, but not more than \$1 million a year, must go to the New Orleans Police and Justice Foundation, a nonprofit organization that will pay police for "enhanced patrols" near the Fair Grounds in an area bounded by DeSaix Boulevard, Moss Street, Ursulines Avenue, North Broad Avenue and St. Bernard Avenue.

The bill would give the council the authority to amend the boundaries. Murray said the rest of the money goes to an array of programs including financing for City Park.

Murray's bill had the support of New Orleans lobbyist Rodney Braxton, but he did not testify.

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