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Sports Betting Alliance charges lawmakers with ‘backroom dealing’ on gaming bill

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The president of a national sports gambling lobby accused Assembly lawmakers of “backroom dealing” over a bill that would give tribes control over online sports betting in Wisconsin.

Sports Betting Alliance President Joe Maloney cited the Feb. 19 voice vote passing AB 601 to the Senate as he charged lawmakers with working behind closed doors and behind residents’ backs.

“The people of Wisconsin unfortunately don’t have the benefit right now of knowing how their elected representatives voted,” Maloney said in a presser Monday, calling it “another instance of backroom dealing in Wisconsin that residents are continuing to resent more and more.”

Four GOP lawmakers registered their opposition to the bill in the Assembly Journal after the voice vote. The bill is now in the Senate but has yet to receive a hearing, and its path forward is unclear.

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Majority Leader Tyler August in a statement argued that a bill passes by voice vote when it has broad support and “reflects consensus among elected representatives.”

“The reality is that some groups are upset because they didn’t get their preferred result. But Wisconsin’s legislative process isn’t controlled by outside interests, and it’s not for sale. Our responsibility is to the constituents we serve,” August, R-Walworth, said. “I’m proud that my colleagues rejected arguments from an association with no real presence here and instead focused on ensuring fairness and

accountability under Wisconsin law."

Rep. Kalan Haywood of Milwaukee, the lead Democrat on the bill, did not immediately return requests for comment.

The bill would create a new exemption in the state's definition of "bet" to allow for wagers placed on mobile or electronic devices by a person in Wisconsin, provided the service processing the bet is located on Wisconsin tribal lands and follows the state's gaming compacts.

The lobby, which represents the five largest sports gambling companies in the country – DraftKings, FanDuel, Fanatics Sportsbook, Bet 365 and BetMGM – spent some $262,603 lobbying against AB 601 and its companion bill last year.

Maloney cited concerns raised by the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty over whether the bill violated the state Constitution and federal statutes. He also argued the bill would create an unfair monopoly that would limit consumer satisfaction and state revenue.

"When we're driving more competitors into the marketplace, we're just delivering a better product for the consumer, and that's delivering more back to the state, as opposed to monopoly or duopoly operations that won't have the opportunity," Maloney said.

He said the SBA's members would be willing to work with the tribes as part of a "multi-stakeholder dialogue" with lawmakers.

Maloney also alluded to prediction markets like Kalshi and Polymarket increasingly targeting Wisconsinites, though he noted the lobby does not take a position on their legality.

Those services allow users to profit or lose money on "predictions" on sports, entertainment, politics, and any other number of things. Prediction markets are regulated under the U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission instead of state and federal gambling statutes, making them legal in Wisconsin. A Marquette University Law School poll released last week found 64% of Wisconsin voters opposed legalizing online sports betting in the state, including majorities of Democrats and Republicans.