

Director of Idaho racing commission retires amid questions

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The head of Idaho's agency that regulates horse racing has retired following increased scrutiny over possible conflicts of interest surrounding his consulting work out of state.

Frank Lamb's retirement was announced Friday and effective immediately, said Teresa Baker, spokeswoman for the Idaho State Police, which oversees the Idaho Racing Commission.

"(He) announced he was going to retire months ago, but stayed on to help with the hiring process and get that person trained," Baker said. "He was going to stay for (the legislative) session, but after the added scrutiny this week and with what's going on with everything else, he retired from the racing commission."

The Associated Press attempted to contact Lamb on Friday, but a phone number provided was no longer in service.

Earlier this week, the Idaho Statesman reported Lamb had been working as a consultant in Wyoming for a simulcast and instant horse racing company. In 2013, Lamb testified in support of legalizing instant horse racing before Idaho lawmakers while also being a registered lobbyist in Wyoming.

In that same year, instant horse racing became legal in Idaho and Wyoming.

The Idaho State Police did not see a have a problem with Lamb being the agency's director and a lobbyist in Wyoming, Baker said. "We want experts in that field," she said.

Lamb has also been in the middle of defending the slot-like machines, known as instant racing, in front of Idaho lawmakers. There is currently proposed legislation to repeal the 2013 statute that allowed instant racing to be legal in Idaho.

Roughly 250 instant horse racing machines have been installed throughout Idaho since the law was passed. They resemble slot machines, with animations and music. Bettors are wagering on past races, but the horse names are unknown before they place their bets. The machines only show the last few seconds of the race, and payouts are instant. Racing officials say gamblers aren't betting against the house, but a pool of other gamblers.

Four Idaho tribes have opposed the legalization of the instant racing machines. Meanwhile, northern Idaho police have launched a criminal investigation looking to see if the machines are slot machines.

Lamb's connections with Wyoming go back to 2003, when he was the director of the Wyoming Pari-Mutuel Commission. That year the Wyoming Supreme Court ruled that instant racing was illegal, saying

"we are dealing with a slot machine that attempts to mimic traditional pari-mutuel wagering. Although it may be a good try, we are not so easily beguiled."

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