

The Herald | heraldonline.com

[print](#) | [close window](#)

Newberry County video poker proposal draws opposition from state GOP leaders

By John O'Connor · The (Columbia) State

Updated 07/29/08 - 12:48 AM |

 [Comment on this story](#)

COLUMBIA -- State Republicans are criticizing a Newberry County proposal to ask voters about using video poker revenue to offset property taxes.

Attorney General Henry McMaster has said such a proposal violates state law, and top Republicans said the idea is a ploy to draw Democratic voters to the polls this fall.

The ballot question is only advisory and is not legally binding, county elections officials said.

The chairman of Newberry County Council said that while he is interested in the poll results, he does not support bringing back video poker. Councilman Henry B. Summer said he wanted to draw attention to things state government should be funding.

Video poker parlors, Summer said, often caused headaches for law enforcement.

"When you say 'unfunded mandate' nobody seems to listen," Summer said. "But when you say 'video poker,' you get everybody's attention.

"We don't want to have bake sales" to pay for services.

Summer said Newberry County Council recently approved \$50,000 to help the local National Guard armory complete repairs. State government should be paying that cost, he said.

But state GOP chairman Katon Dawson said county officials are making a promise they know they cannot keep.

"Members of County Council know that video poker has been ruled illegal," Dawson said, noting that a county ordinance cannot supersede a state law. He thinks the "ploy" is meant to bring out voters and campaign donations.

Summer said the county attorney has advised council members they cannot allow video poker.

Dawson said support is growing in Newberry for Republican

candidates who pledge to restrain county spending.

Using video poker revenue to pay property taxes in Newberry County was first floated by resident Sam Martin. Since then, Martin claims to have collected thousands of residents' signatures in support.

While supporters said the idea is not meant to entice Democratic voters, South Carolina does have a tradition of provocative ballot questions, said Francis Marion University political scientist Neal Thigpen.

The most successful, Thigpen said, was a question about flying the Confederate flag posed during the 1994 Republican gubernatorial primary. Pro-flag voters, Thigpen said, helped carry David Beasley to the nomination and swell the party ranks.

"It was a huge success in terms of turning out voters," Thigpen said.

Other ballot questions that might have had a similar effect, Thigpen said, included a 2006 constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage, a 2000 question creating a state lottery, and a 1999 question abolishing video poker.

The state Supreme Court ruled the video poker question unconstitutional prior to the election, but only after groups on both sides had spent months organizing voters.

"They're emotional issues," Thigpen said. "That's fine old American stuff."

All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be published, broadcast or redistributed in any manner.

[Refinance and Save](#)

\$1,000S

\$150,000 Mortgage for \$483/month. Compare up to 4 free quotes. pickamortgage.com

[See Today's](#)

Mortgage Rates

Calculate Your New Mortgage Payment. See Rates- No Credit Check LowerMyBills.com

[Car Insurance](#)

Quotes Online

Compare auto insurance quotes from top companies online. www.insurance.com

Ads by Yahoo!