Written by Aaron Tallent
Wednesday, 16 November 2005 19:00

Barring a major change of heart by the U.S. House of Representatives, the federal government will not be establishing a federal boxing commission in the 109th Congress.

Earlier today the House voted against H.R. 1065, the United States Boxing Commission Act, by a vote of 233-190. This legislation would have established a three-member U.S. Boxing Commission (USBC) within the Department of Commerce to oversee the sport of boxing.

Boxing is currently regulated on the state level. Each state is required to follow minimum federal standards.

Supporters say a USBC will restore the integrity of boxing, while detractors say it is not needed and adds another layer of bureaucracy to the federal government.

"This is a big government bill. It creates a new federal agency that provides for more regulation and is not self-financing," said Republican Congressman James Sensenbrenner.

All in all, 185 Republicans voted against the legislation.

Rep. Cliff Stearns, a Republican from Florida, introduced the legislation in March of this year. Under its provisions, the President would appoint Commissioners to serve three-year terms. Among many duties, the USBC would be assigned with creating and maintaining a national boxing personnel registry and studying the health and safety factors of the sport.

Boxing is the only professional sport without a national commission. However, if a USBC is ever formed, it would be the only national sporting commission within the federal government.

The opposition to a federal boxing commission does not just center on conservatives. While a majority of the Senate and many former boxers feel that a USBC is needed, there are many in boxing who believe it to be unnecessary, and simply unfair.

“While a recent test revealed that between 5 and 7 percent of major-league baseball players tested positive for steroids, professional baseball is not comprehensively regulated by a federal agency,” said Linda P. Torres, legal advisor to the International Boxing Federation (IBF), in her testimony before the House Energy and Commerce Committee in March. “While NASCAR drivers travel at speeds of up to nearly 200 miles per hour which has led to notable deaths and injuries, race car driving is not comprehensively regulated by the federal government.”

Torres went on to say, “Congress could direct the ABC to establish minimum health and safety requirements for boxers to be adopted by each state… This would allow Congress to address the health and safety issues in the sport without having to create and fund a federal agency to oversee the sport.”

Under Stearns legislation, a USBC would cost $5 million in 2006 and $26 million over the next five years. However, it would not affect the federal government's spending and revenue. "As I envision it," said Rep. Stearns before the vote, "the sanctioning bodies within boxing would fund the USBC, sparing the taxpayers the expense of a sport commission."

Senator John McCain of Arizona, who has been the strongest advocate of boxing reform for more than a decade, introduced similar legislation in the Senate earlier this year. One of the major differences is that Stearns' legislation would sunset after six years. McCain's, which passed the Senate by unanimous consent on May 10, 2005, does not.

Before legislation can be sent to the President for his signature, it must be approved in identical form by both the House and Senate. Often times, each legislative chamber will have differing versions of the same bill. So both the House and Senate must work together to create a compromise bill, a conference report.

Stearns had said earlier that he felt that he could work out the differences between his and McCain's legislation in a conference committee. Of course, that will not be necessary since Stearns legislation was defeated earlier today.

In the past ten years, Congress has passed two laws, both introduced by McCain in the Senate, reforming boxing regulation and oversight. The first, the Professional Boxing Safety Act of 1996 created uniform registration, licensing, and safety standards for all state boxing commissions.

The second, the Muhammad Ali Boxing Act of 2000, among many changes, reformed contracts between boxers and managers. Most notably, it prohibited contracts between promoters and fighters from being elongated if that particular boxer wins a championship.