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Treasurer reviewing fantasy sports gaming industry

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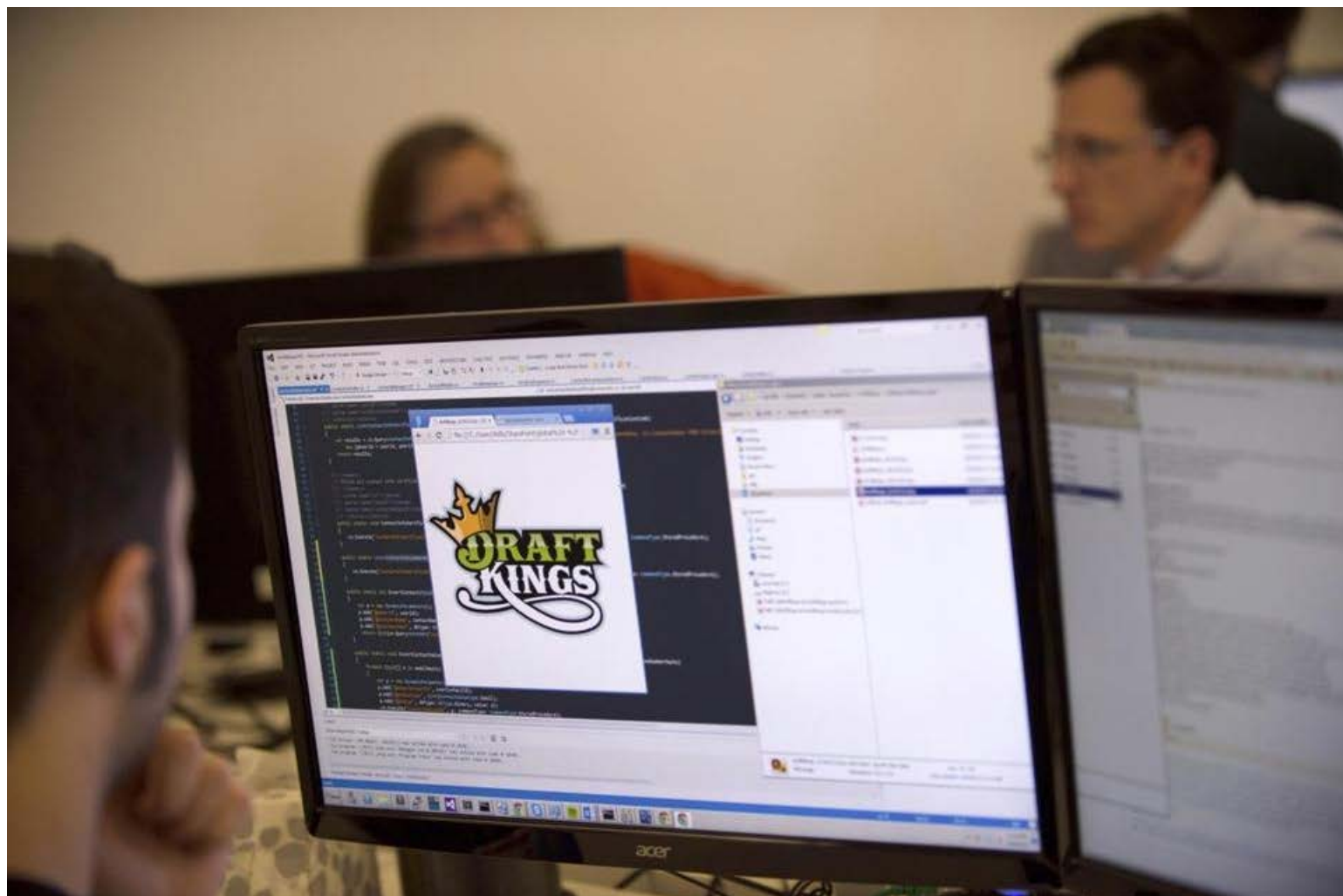
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(GRETCHEN ERTL/THE NEW YORK TIMES)

An employee at work for DraftKings in the company's offices in Boston on April 22, 2014.

By Matt Rocheleau

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 07, 2015

Massachusetts State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, who runs the state lottery, says her office is

reviewing fantasy sports gaming websites such as DraftKings and FanDuel and considering the possibility of having the lottery run its own online fantasy games.

She said she is particularly concerned that the new, rapidly growing industry could hurt lottery revenue.

“It’s our responsibility as the Lottery Commission to really look at everything that impacts the lottery,” Goldberg told reporters at her State House office Wednesday. “We are looking at: How do we maintain revenues and how do we be creative?”

“The lottery provides almost a billion dollars back to every city and town in this Commonwealth, and they rely on those funds,” Goldberg added. “When you think about what lottery dollars do, it’s literally — no exaggeration — it’s teachers, it’s firefighters, it’s snow plowing. . . . We know how important those unrestricted funds are to the local communities, so we need to understand what’s happening here.”

She also expressed concern for consumers.

“What we understand is how easily customers can be victimized, and at the lottery we protect the customers,” she said. “We are regulated. We’ve been reliable. We’ve been in this space responsibly for over 40 years.

“The people from those companies — which have just taken off and they’re obviously just profit-driven, which is not what we are,” she continued. “I’m assuming that they’re trying to build these companies really fast and trying to sell them. But the bottom line is that isn’t good for Massachusetts. I don’t know if it’s good for the country.”

Goldberg said her office’s review of online fantasy sports gaming will be broad and will include exploring the idea that the Lottery Commission venture outside its usual realm of offering games of chance and add offerings of

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games of skill, which would include fantasy sports gaming.

She referred to legislation filed last month that would allow the state lottery “to implement online games of skill, including, but not limited to, fantasy sports.”

Goldberg’s position on the topic appeared to evolve over the course of the day. On Wednesday morning, the Boston Herald reported that Goldberg was interested in getting in on fantasy sports betting. But when asked by reporters in the afternoon if the Lottery Commission is considering creating a site to compete with private companies such as DraftKings and FanDuel, she said, “No, we haven’t looked at that at all.”

But later, officials from her office said that the lottery is, in fact, considering such an idea.

“There is clearly an appetite for this kind of game play. . . . We are currently having discussions on how to offer this new format in a venue that protects the consumer and preserves fundamental fairness within the game,” said a statement from Goldberg’s office. “We look forward to a partnership with the Legislature on the future of our involvement in this market.”

Governor Charlie Baker said he has spoken with Goldberg about her review.

“I think she’s in what I would call an inquiry mode at this point, and I think that’s fine,” Baker told reporters Wednesday.

But Baker said he is more concerned with the review Attorney General Maura Healey is conducting on the matter.

“I think the right strategy here for the Commonwealth . . . is to give the attorney general an opportunity to look at this and sort of define the rules of the road here,” he said. “In the short term, what we really need to know is what the AG thinks of all this, and I’m looking forward to her findings.”

House Speaker Robert DeLeo said the Legislature is also waiting “anxiously” for more facts and recommendations from Healey.

Healey, in a statement Wednesday, said that as part of her review, members of her office have asked

to meet with executives from fantasy sports gaming companies to better understand how the companies operate.

She said she is “focused on ensuring that there are proper consumer protections in place.”

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