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**BODY:**

SAN FRANCISCO (CBS.MW) -- The deadline to file 2003 taxes is fast approaching and that has traffic to Web sites handling consumer taxes rising.

Hrblock.com saw the number of unique visitors jump 221 percent to 363,000 during the week ending Jan. 18, according to Nielsen//NetRatings. The five fastest growing tax sites combined drew more than 2.8 million unique visitors, the Web traffic measurement company said.

Traffic to Taxact.com saw a 45-percent jump to 237,000 visitors while Turbotax saw an increase of 44 percent to more than half a million. Quicken saw a 37 percent increase to 968,000 visitors. The IRS.gov site attracted 1.3 million unique visitors.

Cato says legalize Net bookies

The best way to curb Internet gambling excesses is to legalize online gaming, according to **Cato Institute**, a conservative think tank.

As gambling on the Internet rises, lawmakers are moving toward a formal prohibition of online gaming. But proposals sponsored by Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Ariz. and Rep. James Leach, R-Iowa, seeking to restrict the flow of funds into online gambling operations, will not succeed, according to Kolemian Strumpf, writing for the **Cato Institute**.

One reason is that prohibition policies have perverse effects and encourages the very behavior they seek to curtail, said Strumpf. Major sports betting is illegal in all states except Nevada, yet individuals wager between \$80 and \$380 billion dollars with illegal bookmakers, according to National Gambling Impact Study. This is nearly 100 times the amount bet on professional sports with legal bookmakers, noted Strumpf.

A far more sensible policy, he suggested, is to create a legal framework for Internet bookmakers. This could put limit the potential excesses of gambling, he said.

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