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News Coverage on Casino Gambling

Anti-gambling group opposes casino amendment

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<http://www.theithacajournal.com/article/20120521/NEWS10/205210390/Anti-gambling-...> ^[3]

ALBANY -- For a coalition of religious groups and community advocates, it's never too early to look toward next year.

State lawmakers in March passed a constitutional amendment that would allow for seven full-fledged casinos statewide. But an amendment must be passed by consecutively elected sessions of the Legislature and later by a vote of the public.

The anti-gambling coalition already has its eye on 2013, which is the soonest date the second vote by the Legislature and one by the public could take place.

The group -- the Coalition Against Gambling in New York - has met with state legislators, hoping to connect with incumbents running for re-election who would again have to vote on the casino amendment next year.

"We feel that it's not too soon to begin laying the groundwork for a fight next year," said Joel Rose, the chairman of the Buffalo-based group. "Most of the legislators who are here now will be back then, and we'll be talking to people who are candidates, also. This is not going to be the end of our efforts; this is really the beginning of our efforts on this amendment."

The coalition distributed a series of position papers on the amendment, opposing it for a variety of reasons. The economic development benefits of casinos are overrated, and legalizing any form of gambling raises "moral questions" about "the state raising revenue at the expense of the most vulnerable," the group wrote.

"We're opposed to gambling because of the human destruction that it brings," said the Rev. Duane Motley, senior lobbyist for New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms, which is based in Monroe County. "Gambling does not produce economic stimulus that the government likes to paint that it will."

Gov. Andrew Cuomo has been a supporter of the amendment allowing the seven casinos, saying New York already allows various forms of gambling and is losing tax revenue to bordering states that allow table games. The state is already home to five American Indian casinos, as well as video-lottery terminals housed at horseracing tracks.

"By taking these important first steps to legalize casinos we are finally confronting the reality that while New York is already in the gaming [business](#) ^[4], we need a real plan to regulate and capitalize on the industry," Cuomo said in a statement in March.

James Featherstonhaugh, president of the New York Gaming Association, touted the job-creation and tax-revenue benefits of casinos, particularly when it comes to education [funding](#) ^[4]. His group is pushing for Las Vegas-style casinos at the state's horse tracks.

"I understand that gambling, like many other things, brings some risks of societal issues being raised and brings some challenges if it's going to be done responsibly and well," he said. "But when it is done responsibly, as I believe New York's existing racetrack casinos do in consultation with problem-gaming experts, then it really is just one more entertainment choice that the public can either use or not use as it desires."

Rose said his coalition is undeterred by the casinos and pro-gaming groups that have already begun funding advertising campaigns touting the benefits of the amendment.

"Even if this amendment passes and we have seven additional casinos, I don't know why anybody would think it will stop there," he said. "There's all that untapped revenue from Internet gambling, so you can have casino gambling in your home 24/7 and lose your house while you're still in it."

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