

The State of Florida is considering a statewide expansion of casino gambling, with proposals on the table from leading Las Vegas gaming, hotel and entertainment companies. Despite opposing casino gambling expansion in the state during his campaign, newly elected Governor [Rick](#)

Scott said he is open to the proposition. Scott increased speculation on the issue after visiting with [Sheldon Adelson](#) Chairman and CEO of [Las Vegas Sands Corp](#) . within weeks of winning the governor's seat.

On his way to the Republican Governor's Association meeting in San Diego, Scott stopped in [Las Vegas](#) and met with Adelson, whose company owns [The Venetian](#) in Las Vegas and hotels and casinos worldwide. The company has been pushing Florida to lift its ban on statewide casino gambling, and Adelson has said he's willing to invest up to \$3 billion on a Miami based resort and destination casino project.

In the Governor's first press conference since taking office, Scott played his cards close to his vest, telling reporters he doesn't want Florida to "become very largely dependent on gaming for revenue" and noted the state already allows gambling.

Florida has a state lottery, the [Seminole Indian Tribe](#) has seven operating gambling facilities, including the successful [Seminole Hard Rock Hotel and Casino](#) in Hollywood, Florida, all providing the state a cut of their revenue. The state also permits betting at horse and dog tracks and jai alai frontons.

Florida expanded gambling as recently as last year. New legislation signed into law by former Governor Crist allows for the Seminole tribe to offer blackjack and baccarat at five of their seven locations. All of the Seminole casinos are now permitted to operate Vegas style slot machines. The legislation also gave pari-mutuels the right to offer no-limit poker games in their card rooms.

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Florida's new pro-gaming laws did not escape the notice of Las Vegas casino companies. Al Cardenas, a lobbyist for [Wynn Casinos](#) told the [Miami Herald](#) this week, "The concept is not just to create a source of revenue for the state that could equal or surpass the lottery. More important is the billions that would be invested in our state and the creation of tens of thousands of permanent, high-paying jobs." Wynn Casinos have reportedly made a casino proposal to Governor Scott in addition to the proposal by Adelson's Las Vegas Sands Corp.

Florida Senator Mike Haridopolos (R) took a pro-gambling position telling a Tallahassee radio station this week, "We're a big-time gambling state, and we need to figure out in general how we're going to maximize revenue because people are going to gamble." Haridopolos said new casino gambling legislation has about a "50-50" chance of being approved.

Speculation also increased after the Florida Senate heard a report on Tuesday showing how thirteen other states have collected hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues after opening their doors to traditional Las Vegas style games, including Pennsylvania which saw a \$1 billion dollar revenue windfall. The report was authorized by Haridopolos.

With Florida's \$3.5 billion dollar budget gap and Governor's Scott campaign pledge to create 700,000 jobs in seven years, casino expansion in the state appears headed for thorough consideration. During the 2010 election, Scott's economic plan for the state was known as the "7-7-7" plan, a title with likely unintentional gaming overtones.

While legislation has not yet been proposed, Florida Senator Dennis Jones (R) told the Miami Herald he is sponsoring a bill to bring destination casinos to Florida. Under his plan, Florida would allow four to five casino resorts to bid for a chance to operate full casinos, including slot machines, blackjack, roulette, baccarat and craps. Bidders would pay a \$50 million application fee and if successful will be offered the exclusive contract to operate the games within a 75-mile radius.

If Governor Scott and the Legislature take action to make Florida a casino state, significant opposition is to be expected from the Seminole Tribe seeking protection of their casino interests, [Disney](#) and [Universal Studios](#), each competing for tourism and entertainment dollars, as well as conservative opponents to gaming in Florida's Legislature.

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