

Study suggests hike in casino taxes - Jackson Clarion Ledger

Written by Administrator

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Mississippi's gaming industry remains a premier destination, but a study requested by a lawmaker offers ideas - from raising the tax on operators to adding horse or dog racing - for boosting revenue collected by the state.

The 69-page report, conducted by the Stennis Institute

of Government at Mississippi State University, examines the industry and how it compares to other markets in the country. State Rep. George Flaggs, D-Vicksburg, requested the analysis but has not yet reviewed it.

"I asked for them to do a comprehensive study on how we compare to other states," Flaggs said. "I wanted them to look at how our taxes match up."

Judith Phillips, a research analyst with the Stennis Institute, is expected to make a presentation to members of the House Appropriations Committee this afternoon.

Casino revenues have dropped from nearly \$2.65 billion in 2000 to \$2.46 billion in 2009. Through November, casinos collected \$2.2 billion in 2010. Final figures for the year are expected to be released this week.

According to a copy of the report obtained by The Clarion-Ledger, Mississippi's casino industry ranks fourth nationally in gross revenues, and only Nevada has a more favorable gaming tax rate than Mississippi.

"When people in this industry are deciding they are going to spend money in Macau, the Caribbean and around the United States, they look at tax rates and stability of government ... and that is why Mississippi has been successful," House Gaming Committee Chairman Bobby Moak said.

Researchers noted that although Louisiana's casino revenues lagged Mississippi's by \$9 million, the state received nearly twice as much in tax revenues.

Moak said raising taxes would be detrimental to the gaming industry, and there are significant differences in how Mississippi and Louisiana handle gaming.

Mississippi will welcome any business that has the money to build a casino, the infrastructure and amenities, similar to how it is done in Las Vegas, he said.

"Louisiana has a limited number of licenses for casinos that come into the state, Moak, D-Bogue Chitto, said. Having the limited number of licenses has allowed Louisiana to charge higher taxes for the limited number of spots.

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