

Casino project resumes with \$261 million from NJ - The Star-Ledger - NJ.com

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After a two year delay, construction will resume next week on the Revel Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City thanks to a \$261 million boost from the state, Gov. Chris Christie announced yesterday.

"The state will put its efforts and its credibility and its

money where its mouth is," Christie said in the shell of the hotel's lobby, where he signed bills that will deregulate Atlantic's City gambling industry in an attempt to breath new life into a resort facing competition from surrounding states.

The Economic Development Authority approved financing for the Revel project and in turn the state will be a 20 percent partner, ensuring a piece of the casino's profit, Christie said. The state will not share any potential losses, Christie spokesman Michael Drewniak said, and the arrangement will end once the \$261 million is recouped.

Christie said the state aid is about 8 percent of anticipated sales tax revenue for the project. The bulk of the financing, about \$1.155 billion, is private, he said. The plan, however, drew criticism from conservative and liberal groups.

"It's just another in a long line of failed attempts to subsidize Atlantic City," said Americans for Prosperity New Jersey Director Steve Lonagan, a conservative who lost to Christie in the 2009 GOP primary. "The Revel Casino hit the jackpot here at government expense."

New Jersey Policy Perspective Executive Director Deborah Howlett questioned how Christie could claim the state is broke while promising hundreds of millions in subsidies.

"When we have to take such deep cuts in our investment in educating our children, in police, in sanitation workers, for Pete's sake, but we're still finding hundreds of millions to give to corporations, there's an imbalance there," said Howlett, a former spokeswoman for Gov. Jon Corzine, who lost to Christie in 2009.

Christie said with deregulation, casinos will save money and can invest more in advertising and marketing. He wants to turn Atlantic City into a vacation and convention destination.

The law establishes a tourism district and requires a division of police be funded by the city and patrol the district.

Christie and Atlantic City Mayor Lorenzo Langford, who skipped the press conference, have been at odds over the plan.

Langford contends the city will be required to divert resources from high-crime areas to the low-crime casino district, noting the populations of the areas to be in the tourism district are mostly white while most in areas left out are black.

Compounding the issue, Atlantic City laid off police officers last year to balance their budget, Langford said. "It is the belief that all the neighborhoods should be in it or none, (residents) are calling it Christie's apartheid," he said.

Christie counters that State Police will help patrol the district and it won't cause problems for the non-district residents. He dismissed Langford's criticisms as "baloney."

"He's just playing to the lowest common denominator and the worst of our society," Christie said. "He should be ashamed of himself. I believe our Attorney General, who is also African-American, told him the same thing yesterday."

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester) said as the prime sponsor he never heard concern from Langford. "Enough with the race baiting, enough with the grandstanding," Sweeney said. "It's right for the city and the people of the city."

Staff writer Matt Friedman contributed to this article.

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