

With expanded casino gambling now part of Massachusetts' future, many businesses throughout the commonwealth continue to question the residual effects of three casinos on the business community. While I have no delusions that casinos will be a panacea for the fiscal and employment challenges we face, I view this legislation as an exciting opportunity to grow and diversify our economy.

Due to an ongoing effort by the Legislature, municipalities and local businesses to adapt to today's economic climate, the Massachusetts economy has consistently performed better than those of other states. We have experienced employment growth in health care, clean energy, and life sciences while focusing our resources on infrastructure improvements. As a result, Massachusetts has an unemployment rate of 7.3 percent, well below the national rate of 8.6 percent.

The benefits of both the short- and long-term revenue that will come from casino gambling are wide and varied for the business community. Millions of dollars will be directed to key areas that will directly contribute to the continued growth of our economy and workforce. For example, we will direct 14 percent of the gaming revenue to fund our public schools, as well as higher education programs. At a time when community colleges are experiencing growing demand, we have also established a community college fund to help graduate a highly skilled workforce.

While the much-discussed revenue-enhancement aspect of the casino legislation is important, it's the addition of 10,000 to 15,000 new jobs for Massachusetts residents that speaks directly to the needs of local businesses. By putting people back to work, we are re-energizing the consumer base to bolster such businesses as hospitality, retail, restaurants and entertainment. And few will debate the power of casinos to provide these much-needed jobs. The domino effect of the recession has been felt by most businesses in Worcester; where unemployment has been high, discretionary spending has been predictably low. But through the infusion of new employment, consumers will once again have the opportunity to provide for their families, earn decent wages and spend their hard-earned dollars in local businesses.

Worcester is slowly returning to its place of prominence as a tourist destination. However, thousands of Central Massachusetts residents leave our state every weekend to pursue gaming in other states, bringing with them money that would be better invested here.

Written by Administrator

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Having watched the resurgence of many of Worcester's great venues, including the Hanover Theatre, the Worcester Art Museum and Union Station, I remain very proud of the Worcester business community's vision and success. In an effort to mitigate any negative effects on this success, I co-sponsored an amendment — which made it into the legislation — that requires casinos to negotiate with local businesses before booking live entertainment and shows.

I am confident casino gambling will prove to be the impetus we need to reinvigorate the business community, improve consumer spending and reduce unemployment.

*Michael Moore is the state senator for the Second Worcester District, which covers Auburn, Grafton, Leicester, Millbury, Shrewsbury, Upton and Wards 5-8 in Worcester.*

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