

Route to Gary land-based casino may pass through southern Indiana : Elections

Written by Administrator
Monday, 10 December 2012 07:02 -

INDIANAPOLIS | The 266 miles separating Gary and Elizabeth, Ind., located across the Ohio River from Louisville, Ky., are about as far as you can travel without leaving the state, and few Hoosiers ever make the trip.

But Gary's best chance to win approval for a land-based casino during the upcoming legislative session may rest with southern Indiana lawmakers similarly looking to improve their casinos in the face of new competition across state lines.

As in Northwest Indiana where the five casinos were sited to draw gamblers mostly from adjacent states, the five southern Indiana casinos are located on the Ohio River across from major cities in Ohio and Kentucky.

For years, those casinos thrived as the only places to play a slot machine or a hand of blackjack for hundreds of miles.

However, when the Horseshoe Casino opens in downtown Cincinnati this spring, attendance at the Cincinnati-adjacent casinos in the Indiana towns of Lawrenceburg, Rising Sun and Florence is expected to drop, reducing local and state tax revenue and possibly putting casino employees out of work.

They're also keeping watch across the river in Elizabeth, home to Horseshoe Casino Southern Indiana.

The primary opponent to gambling in Kentucky, Senate President David Williams, recently quit the Legislature for a judgeship, setting up a possible 2014 vote on a constitutional amendment legalizing casinos. Churchill Downs in Louisville is all but certain to get a casino if the amendment passes.

Ten of Indiana's 13 casinos are near the borders of other states, and at Northwest Indiana's five casinos a majority of the gamblers are from Illinois or Michigan. Illinois is closer to approving

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casinos for Chicago and the south suburbs, possibly one right on the state border.

One southern Indiana group, a New Albany-based economic development association, wants Indiana to strengthen its casino industry before Kentucky gets its act together.

In its 2013 legislative agenda, the group calls on the General Assembly to make whatever changes are needed to ensure Hoosier casinos stay in business.

"We urge the Indiana Legislature to undertake comprehensive revision of the state's existing gaming laws to allow the casino industry to remain competitive and, as a result, to continue to provide the tax revenue, jobs and other benefits that have become an integral part of our state and local economies," the agenda states.

That could include permitting casinos to relocate to a more easily accessible site, such as along a highway, instead of on a river or lake, said state Rep. Ed Clere, R-New Albany.

It remains to be seen whether Northwest Indiana supporters of gaming reform will partner with southern Indiana lawmakers on legislation that could help both regions of the state.

State Sen. Earline Rogers, D-Gary, the leading proponent of a land-based casino in Gary, plans to bundle in one bill the casino move and other Gary-specific proposals -- such as a teaching hospital with a trauma center at Indiana University Northwest and additional economic development measures.

She hopes there will be enough in the omnibus Gary legislation that all region lawmakers and enough legislators from the rest of the state will vote for the plan, even if they oppose portions of it.

Read more <http://news.google.com/news/url?sa=t&fd=R&usg=AFQjCNFEOTT0i1KVg0q6lVcHCKEz1WcmFQ&url=http://www.nwitimes.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/route>

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