

Casino competition worries Ind. leaders

Written by Administrator
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NEW ALBANY, Ind. — Indiana needs to “take a holistic look” at its gambling policies in light of growing competition from out-of-state casinos that is threatening a tax revenue stream the state relies on, a lawmaker says.

State Rep. Ed Clere (R-New Albany) said Indiana has become “very dependent” on its casino revenue and lawmakers need to find ways to shore up that revenue. The state needs to re-examine the number of gambling licenses it allows, the locations where gambling is allowed and the state’s tax structure, the Courier-Journal of Louisville, Ky., reported Tuesday.

“The Indiana legislature has made gaming policy in an incremental, ad-hoc, usually reactive fashion for two decades now, and I think it’s time to take a holistic look at all our gambling statutes,” said Clere. He said he may sponsor a gambling bill during the legislative session that begins Monday.

Indiana faces increased competition in Illinois, Michigan and Ohio, where a Horseshoe Casino is set to open March 4 in Cincinnati that will create more competition for southern Indiana’s riverboat casinos.

State Senate President David Long (R-Fort Wayne), said in November that the Legislature needs to take action to reverse the drop in gambling revenues by making Indiana’s casinos more competitive.

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Ten of Indiana's 13 casinos are located near an adjoining state line. And Long said there is "an all-out assault" by adjoining states to take back that money.

He and House Speaker Brian Bosma (R-Indianapolis) have both questioned fellow Republican Gov.-elect Mike Pence's plan to cut individual income taxes by 10 percent at a time when casino revenues are falling, Indiana faces federal pressure to increase Medicaid spending and the impact of other tax cuts remains to be seen.

Since Indiana's first riverboat casino, Evansville's Casino Aztar, opened in 1995, casinos have generated more than \$10 billion in wagering and admission tax revenue around the state. Last fiscal year, however, 6 percent fewer people visited the state's casinos than two years ago, and overall tax revenue fell 5 percent, or \$43.6 million, during that time.

Expanded gambling has been considered in Kentucky, but lawmakers there rejected the proposal last year.

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