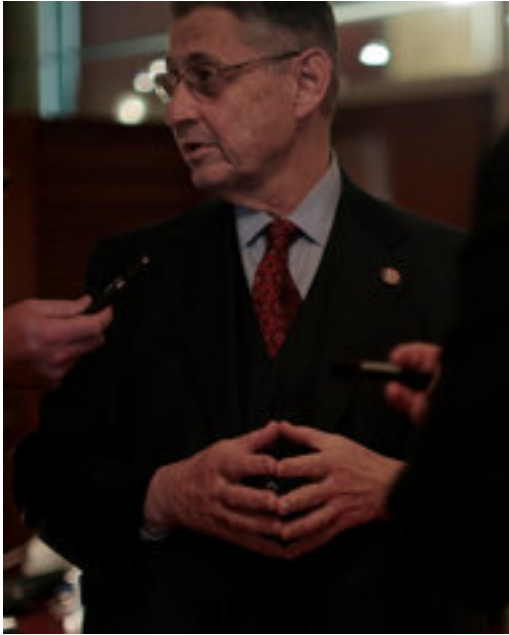


Assembly Leader Softens on Placing Casino in New York City

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 24 January 2013 20:01 -



Nathaniel Brooks for The New York Times Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver spoke with reporters on Thursday in Albany.

ALBANY — Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver said Thursday that he was open to a Las Vegas-style casino in some parts of New York City, as he continued to soften his opposition to the idea of casino development within the five boroughs.

Mr. Silver, a Manhattan Democrat, said he remained opposed to a casino with table games in Manhattan, but would be open to the idea in other areas of the city, specifically naming Coney Island and Willets Point, as well as the Aqueduct racetrack — sites that he has [reportedly](#) been considering for some time.

He also said Thursday that the Legislature wanted to have a say in the siting of any full-scale casinos, challenging a plan by Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo to put the power in the hands of a new gambling commission.

“The Legislature would like to have a role in geographic selection,” he said in comments outside his Albany office.

Mr. Silver has historically been the biggest opponent of casino gambling in New York City, and has been reluctant to consider casino development even on the city’s fringes. But his tone has been moderating over the last several months.

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“I don’t believe densely populated areas of the state should have a casino,” Mr. Silver said. “I don’t believe that people should be able to go on their lunch hour and have the ability to lose a week or a month’s pay on their lunch hour, so we should look at destinations that are not in densely populated areas.”

“There are parts of the city that would qualify for that,” he added. “Manhattan would not, for example. Central Brooklyn would not. Central Queens would not. But there are places that can qualify as destinations within the city, whether it’s Willets Point or Aqueduct or Coney Island.”

There are already nine racetrack slot parlors and five tribal casinos in New York. State lawmakers, acting at Mr. Cuomo’s urging, last year took the first step toward asking voters to allow up to seven full-scale, nontribal casinos in the state; the Legislature will consider the matter again this year, and if a measure passes, it will go before voters in November.

Mr. Cuomo said this month that he would propose phasing in expanded gambling, at first allowing the development of only three casinos, none of them in New York City, in an effort to lift the upstate economy. He has not said where he thinks casinos should be located after that first phase.

The casino industry has been eager to develop in New York because of its large population, concentrated wealth and high level of tourism. A slot parlor at the Aqueduct racetrack has already proved to be [highly lucrative](#), both for the state and its operator; a full-scale casino would bring table games and even more revenue.

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has been [resistant](#) to the idea of a casino in New York City, but his third term ends this year, and he will most likely be out of office by the time the matter is decided.

Last year, [Mr. Silver said of casino development](#) : “I would prefer to stay out of the city, but certainly at best the fringes of the city, in order to avoid the social ills that come with casino gaming. I’m not a fan of casino gaming, and I think generally our conference is not a fan of casino gaming.”

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But on Thursday, he seemed much more at ease with the idea of a casino in the city.

“I mentioned Willets Point because it’s basically a bunch of junkyards right now, and there’s some talk of revitalizing it,” he said.

“Aqueduct is again something that’s not in the densely populated part of the city, Coney Island has a tradition of being a resort area to some extent; obviously it needs some revitalization to do it, but I say I wouldn’t rule those out.”

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