

No to More Casinos in New York State

Written by Administrator
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New York State is home to five casinos run by Indian tribes and nine casinos that are called “racinos” because they are large slot machine parlors near racetracks. Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature now want to expand gambling by putting a constitutional amendment on the Nov. 5 ballot that would add seven full-blown casinos. The answer from voters should be no.

Gambling is a regressive tax that takes its highest toll on those who can least afford it. Casinos often bring higher crime rates and deterioration of the communities nearby. Mr. Cuomo and the gambling interests say the state already has gambling and more won’t increase those problems. But even if you accept that argument, you should not accept the way this amendment is advertised on the ballot as a jobs and growth initiative for upstate New York. It is liable to fail to deliver on that promise.

While there is no doubt that struggling cities and counties upstate need economic development, the experiences of other states that have expanded casino gambling have been mostly dismal. The casino construction jobs are not permanent, and the better-paying croupier and management jobs often go to workers from out of the area and even out of the state. People from the community usually end up with the low-wage service jobs at best, and casino visitors rarely spend their money outside the resort.

Tax-revenue bonanzas can be fleeting as well. Policy experts at the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy have reported that revenues from a new casino usually go up, briefly, but often fall off when gamblers leave for new casinos in nearby states.

When the gambling revenues begin to shrink, taxpayers lose. In June, for example, Gov. Jack Markell of Delaware pledged \$8 million in state funds to three casinos because they were threatening to lay off workers. A recent report from the Center for Gaming Research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, called Atlantic City “a city in crisis,” where gambling revenues have continued to decline. The percentage of people below the poverty line there has increased to 29.3 percent from 22.5 percent in four decades. The unemployment rate is at about 18 percent, and the crime rate is almost three times that of the surrounding county.

Other communities have reported a loss in local business as gamblers are swept into the casino and stay there to spend their money. And the National Association of Realtors reported

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in July that when a casino is built in Massachusetts, the effect on home prices nearby is expected to be “generally negative.” Mr. Cuomo has argued that the constitutional amendment and its accompanying legislation will make it possible to set up a tougher system of monitoring for all gambling operations in the state. That is not a good reason to add casinos or more slot machines. Albany’s lawmakers already have the power to clean up such problems, if they would only use it.

Mr. Cuomo has not successfully made the case that casinos will provide long-term benefits. Putting a small casino at an isolated place like Tioga Downs, which is likely to apply for a casino license if the measure passes, is unlikely to cause much harm. But the same cannot be said of proposals to build casinos near Albany, in the Catskills and ultimately in New York City.

There is plenty of evidence that more casinos will simply do more damage. Voters should reject the constitutional amendment.

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