

## Give 4th casino license to Southern Tier

Written by Administrator

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State Sen. Thomas Libous, R-Binghamton, said the casino-siting board made a mistake overlooking the Southern Tier. (Photo: KRISTOPHER RADDER / Staff Photo) [Buy Photo](#)

Local politicians are calling on the Gaming Facility Location Board to reconsider its decision to not recommend one of the two Southern Tier casino bidders for a license.

"It was our intent from the beginning not to have politics a part of this process," State Sen. Thomas Libous, R-Binghamton, said Friday from the 16th floor of the Binghamton State Office Building. "I assure you that if it was, one of the two Southern Tier sites would have been selected."

In addition to Lago Resort & Casino in Tyre, the Gaming Facility Location Board on Wednesday recommended one license each in the Capital region and the Catskills. The board chose not to pick a fourth project, though the casino legislation gave them the power to recommend up to four, with no more than two in any region.

The two local bidders were Traditions Resort & Casino, in the Town of Union, and Tioga Downs, an existing racino in Nichols. Libous did not issue support for one bidder over the other.

"We need an opportunity," Libous said. "We need the jobs. This part of the state has been hurting for some time, and there is a fourth license that we all know is available. Again, I'm asking for that fourth license to be granted in the true Southern Tier region."

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After Libous' news conference Friday morning, fellow Southern Tier elected officials jumped on board. In a statement, U.S. Rep. Tom Reed, R-Corning, demanded that Gov. Andrew Cuomo locate the fourth casino in Tioga County. Then, shortly after, Assemblywoman Donna Lupardo, D-Endwell, issued a statement in support of the fourth license going to the Southern Tier.

But nothing from the state up to this point indicates a fourth project will be recommended.

In a media briefing Wednesday that followed the board's final meeting, Gaming Facility Location Board Chairman Kevin Law was asked whether it was possible to go back and recommend a fourth license down the road.

"We reached a unanimous consensus that these three selections that we made have the best shot for success," Law said. "There shouldn't be a fourth."

In an email Friday, Gaming Commission spokesman Lee Park pointed to the board's 16-page selection document. The board intends to issue a full report of its findings on all 16 applicants within 30 days.

"The board has declined to select a fourth applicant in the belief that a second competing new gaming facility in any of the regions would make it significantly more difficult for any gaming facility to succeed in that region," the selection document reads.

Following a stop in Sullivan County on Thursday, Cuomo told reporters, "We only are doing three statewide, and I want to make sure they succeed and we're not competing with ourselves. So I don't anticipate doing any more any time soon."

The only glimmer of hope for the Southern Tier's bidders comes from comments made by Stuart Rabinowitz, a location board member and Hofstra University president, on Wednesday.

"This whole process is not controlled by us nor is its future controlled by us," he said. "If the

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legislature and the governor think there ought to be four ... they can change it whenever they want."

Meanwhile, site preparation has started on the \$425 million Lago project in Seneca County — 90 miles northwest of Binghamton.

Jeff Gural, owner of Tioga Downs, said he hopes Cuomo steps in and corrects the "mistake" made by the board to bypass the two Southern Tier bidders.

"I've calmed down a little, and I think it's clear that no one understands why the Southern Tier, which was promised a license, did not get a license," Gural said.

Stephen Donnelly, spokesman for Traditions, said the Town of Union project appreciates the support from local elected officials — though they had hoped to get their backing much earlier on in the process.

"I don't know realistically what the state will be able to do, but we're hopeful that the state will listen to the senator and some of the supporters and kind of the outcry from the community," Donnelly said.

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