

Written by Administrator
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Casino supporters in Massachusetts will be looking to mount another charge for gaming in the Bay State in 2011.

A casino gambling bill advanced all the way to Gov. Deval Patrick's desk in 2010 before he sent it back with changes that the House was unwilling to accept.

Voters in November returned the same leaders to Beacon Hill for 2011, and the old dividing lines –

primarily whether to allow slot machines at race tracks like Raynham Park – still separate Patrick and Senate President Therese Murray from House Speaker Robert DeLeo, who has two tracks in his district.

But DeLeo has already said he wants to start talking casinos with Murray and Patrick sooner in 2011. That could give the three leaders time to come to a compromise that eluded them last summer.

"The House is going to move with gaming legislation I think earlier than it ever has," said Clyde Barrow, director of the Center for Policy Analysis at UMass-Dartmouth who advocates for casino gaming in Massachusetts. "I wouldn't be surprised to see a bill on the docket by February or March."

The 2010 session saw the House pass a gaming bill in April that was unpopular in the Senate and with Patrick.

The bill then sat in the Senate for three months while the two sides essentially milked the clock before making a mad dash at compromise before the July 31 adjournment deadline.

Which side improved its chances this year is a matter of debate. Sen. Marc Pacheco, D-Taunton, a staunch advocate for gaming, says Patrick's solid re-election will strengthen his negotiating position.

Massachusetts lawmakers poised to renew the casino battle in 2011 - Raynham Call

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Barrow, who thinks the Senate added one of the two votes it needed to have a veto-proof majority on the casino question, said Patrick's position is tenuous.

"I think (passage) is more likely this year than last year," said Barrow, who then admitted, "I thought it was a sure thing last year."

Complicating things for the anti-gambling movement in Massachusetts, Barrow said, is the loss of Rep. Daniel Bosley and Sen. Susan Tucker, two longtime anti-gaming advocates in the Legislature.

George Carney, owner of Raynham Park, said he had "no idea" what was in store on the gaming front on Beacon Hill this year, but noted the state's fiscal situation – a projected \$2 billion deficit – is still dim, which will make the immediate cash infusion from an expanded gaming industry a tempting target.

The park no longer has live dog racing, but still offers races via closed-circuit "simulcasting." The state permit for that expires in July, which Carney will seek to get renewed.

"We're paying the state about \$50,000 a week in taxes," Carney said. "They're going to be interested in keeping that tax money coming and keeping people employed."

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