

Written by Administrator
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By PAUL POST
The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Six New York racino

operators — including Saratoga Casino & Raceway — today called on state officials to shelve plans for a Catskills Indian casino, saying it might kill the state's racing industry.

Perhaps more importantly, the letter also signals the possible creation of a formal association that would give New York's racino operators one voice and stronger clout on gaming-related issues.

Shortly before leaving office on December 31, former Governor David Paterson announced a compact with a Wisconsin-based tribe to open a full-scale casino in the economically depressed Catskills, about 90 minutes from New York City.

"The Indian casino would result in the near-certain closure of the Monticello racino, 10 minutes from the proposed site, and take away higher-end and weekend customers from Yonkers, Resorts World New York (Aqueduct) and Saratoga racinos," the letter said. "By our calculation, this will lessen the state tax revenues by hundreds of millions of dollars. Coming on top of the closure of New York City OTB, the opening of the Sullivan County casino may well spell the end of the New York horse racing industry."

An Indian casino would divert \$51 million from New York's racing industry, the letter said.

Six of New York's nine racino operators approved the letter – Genting New York LLC (Aqueduct) Finger Lakes, an upstate Thoroughbred track near Rochester and four harness tracks.

Vernon and Tioga Downs owner Jeff Gural said he didn't sign the letter because he didn't want to publicly criticize Paterson or U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., who supports the Indian proposal. But he said he's "totally opposed" to the idea.

"I think it would be a disaster for the state," Gural said. "It's a terrible idea. I don't think it was thought out."

Gural has considerable influence with the state legislature and has pushed hard for full casino gaming at all racinos, where video lottery terminals and a handful of electronic table games are currently the only machines allowed. Last spring, the Senate passed a bill that would have put full-casino gaming before voters in a statewide referendum. But the Assembly failed to consider the matter.

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Indian casinos pay far less taxes to the state 18 to 25 percent, depending on the site, versus from 60 to 70 percent for VLTs, racino operators said. This not only reduces state revenues, but puts the Indian casino at an advantage by giving it more money to offer free rooms, food and beverage, making it impossible for racinos to compete, the letter said.

Racino operators also called on new Governor Andrew Cuomo to ask the U.S. Department of Interior to "stop the clock" on its statutory, mandated 45-day evaluation of the compact until the state can complete a financial evaluation.

The letter was sent to Cuomo's office, senate and assembly leaders, the Division of Budget and the New York State Division of Lottery, which oversees racino operations.

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