

BOSTON (AP) — Gambling interests are doling out millions trying to sway the minds of lawmakers on Beacon Hill, a flood of spending that continued even after a casino deal between Massachusetts Gov. Deval Patrick and House Speaker Robert DeLeo collapsed last summer.

An Associated Press

review of lobbying records filed with the Massachusetts secretary of state's office found nearly three dozen companies and organizations spent more than \$3 million lobbying legislators in 2010.

That's a jump from 2009, when gambling interests spent \$2.5 million. It's also double \$1.5 million spent in 2008, according to the AP review.

The top spender was Sterling Suffolk Racecourse, which runs the Suffolk Downs racetrack. The racetrack spent more than \$850,000 trying to persuade lawmakers to approve an expanded gambling bill.

The money not only included the salaries of lobbyists but also the cost of polling, public relations consulting, advertising, development of a website, and the printing of brochures, hats and T-shirts.

The racetrack, which hopes to open a so-called "resort-style" casino with entertainment venues, hotels and a retail complex on its 163 acres of land in East Boston and Revere, says a casino will create thousands of jobs and deliver more tax revenues to the state.

"Along with others seeking to increase jobs and growth in this business sector, we worked this past year to educate the public about the economic and fiscal benefits of resort-style casinos and the figures released today show that commitment," Bill Mulrow, chairman of the board for Suffolk Downs, said in a statement.

Suffolk Downs wasn't alone.

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Among the other top spenders was the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, which spent more than \$155,000, Las Vegas Sands Corporation, which spent \$180,000, and the Las Vegas-based Development Associates, LLC, which spent \$315,560.

The lobbying wasn't limited just to casino operators. Companies that manufacture slot machines and other gaming devices and a union representing hotel and restaurant workers also hired lobbyists to press their case.

Kathleen Norbut, senior adviser to the group United to Stop Slots in Massachusetts, said the all-volunteer group couldn't afford to hire lobbyists, but was confident that its argument that casinos prey on gambling addicts and the vulnerable would resonate with lawmakers.

"It's not entertainment, it's a predatory industry," she said. "What price for our political leaders to turn a blind eye?"

Casino gambling is expected to resurface during the new two-year legislative session.

The casino issue blew up at the end of the Legislature's formal session in July when DeLeo and Patrick came to loggerheads over the details of a bill to license casinos and allow slot machines at racetracks.

DeLeo, whose district includes Suffolk Downs and the Wonderland Greyhound Park in Revere, pushed to set aside two slot machine licenses to be bid on by the state's four racetracks. Patrick resisted the so-called "racinos," saying they would make the casino licenses less attractive.

DeLeo said earlier this month that he's hoping to revisit the issue.

The Democrat from Winthrop said he would work closely with the governor and Senate

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President Therese Murray "to devise a gaming plan which can provide much needed jobs, address the 'blue collar depression,' and serve as a source of immediate local aid."

Patrick has said licensing casinos is not at the top of his to-do list, but if lawmakers want to move forward they should try to reach consensus with him first.

If the casino question starts to gain traction again, Norbut said she and other opponents will press lawmakers to look at the social and fiscal downside of expanded gambling.

"We are asking the governor and lawmakers to have an honest discussion about the costs of gambling," she said.

Supporters of casinos are equally hopeful that lawmakers will pass legislation to license one or more gambling venues in the state.

Backers of a casino in the western Massachusetts town of Palmer planned a rally Wednesday evening to help generate support. Mohegan Sun has been eyeing a 150-acre parcel in the town for what they are describing as a destination casino.

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