

ATLANTIC CITY — Gov. Chris Christie doubled down Atlantic City's bets on casino gambling Tuesday when he signed two bills into law designed to revitalize the resort and approved a new financing package to help restart construction on the stalled Revel project.

The measures are designed to jump-start the declining city in its attempt to reinvigorate itself as a vacation destination even if it also means, as analysts have predicted, that some longtime casinos could go out of business. Christie signed bills to create a special casino district and further empower the Casino Redevelopment Authority during a ceremony at the site of the incomplete Revel casino. That came moments after the state Economic Development Authority approved a program to give back \$261.4 million in future taxes generated by the Revel to its developers.

"This truly a landmark day in the transition of Atlantic City," Christie said in the Revel's atrium to the cheering of some 500 hardhat-wearing construction workers. The Atlantic City measures were supported by the construction trades unions, Democratic leaders in the Legislature and the Casino Association of New Jersey.

Democratic state Senate President Stephen M. Sweeney, an officer in the International Association of Ironworkers, attended the event and praised Christie for the decision to bolster Atlantic City.

"A lot of people ignored Atlantic City for a long time, Democrats and Republicans, probably for the last 20 years," Sweeney said. "Administration after administration didn't get the job done, until this administration came."

Atlantic City Mayor Lorenzo T. Langford, a Democrat, opposed the moves. He complained that the state was favoring "certain traditional white neighborhoods to the exclusion of African-Americans."

Sweeney criticized Langford and said the comments were "race-baiting."

Critics of the administration wondered why a casino is getting a tax break, while funds for local schools are cut and the governor decided he did not have enough money to fund the rail tunnel to New York.

"If you fully fund education, you have 8,000 more teachers, and if you fund the (rail) tunnel, you have 6,000 more jobs," said Deborah Howlett, president of the left-leaning New Jersey Policy Perspective think tank. "Why is the casino more important?"

The tax reimbursement will help the developers to obtain the final pieces of \$1.2 billion in loans to finish the project, on which an additional \$1.3 billion has already been spent. If construction is finished, it will bring forth a monstrous new competitor for Atlantic City's remaining 11 casinos and remake the boardwalk.

The tourism district law will create a special district inside of the city that is responsible for

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marketing, security and maintenance.

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