

Construction activity is slated to resume on the stalled Revel casino within a week, putting hammers and other tools back in the hands of more than 2,000 workers.

But there's wide concern that the heavy bet placed by Gov. Chris Christie and other state officials to restart Revel and market Atlantic

City as a vacation destination won't pay off with a net gain of jobs in the long run. The state has agreed to reimburse \$261.4 million in business, sales and hotel taxes to Revel over the next 20 years. That will help close a financing gap to complete the total \$2.5 billion project, officials said.

If the new casino thrives after its expected June 2012 opening, it could come at the expense of the 11 existing casinos and possibly lead to shutdowns, said Bob McDevitt, president of Local 54 of UNITE-HERE, which represents casino workers.

"Revel will cannibalize the market, or what little market is left," McDevitt said.

Atlantic City casinos have been savaged in recent years by slot and casino startups in neighboring states. The gaming halls handled \$3.6 billion in bets last year, down from \$5.2 billion in 2006.

Employment at the casinos peaked at 50,000 but has dropped to 35,000.

Christie said the slump created the need for a revitalization plan but said he expected to hear from critics.

"If you're satisfied with what's going on in Atlantic City now, you won't like this. But if you're satisfied with what's going on in Atlantic City now, you need your head examined," he said.

McDevitt said the state has no business giving a "bailout" deal to Revel, calling the policy "outrageous, especially if it forces other casinos to close."

"Some of these people will be out of jobs and they won't have the benefit of state intervention to help them," he said.

A meltdown would be felt beyond Atlantic City. The vast majority of casino employees licensed or registered by the state Casino Control Commission live in Atlantic County, according to commission records, but the other 20 counties all are also homes to employees.

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