

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 01 March 2011 23:14 -

The mayors of Boston, New Bedford and Salem are among 11 Massachusetts mayors who have written a letter to the governor, House speaker and Senate

president asking them to move quickly to approve casino gambling.

New Bedford Mayor Scott W. Lang and the other mayors are members of the Coalition for Jobs and Growth, a pro-casino organization that also includes local councilors and selectman (New Bedford City Councilor David Alves is a member) and the most prominent building-trade unions across the state.

"The commonwealth needs the jobs and revenues that expanded gaming will bring and needs it now," wrote the coalition in a letter dated Tuesday. "Our local communities, struggling with state aid cuts and declining local receipts, cannot afford to wait any longer."

Lang said the group is frustrated that the governor and Legislature have taken up the issue of casino gambling for years and never been able to pass legislation.

Even with Gov. Deval Patrick, House Speaker Robert DeLeo and Senate President Therese Murray all supporting some kind of casino legislation last year, nothing passed. Talks broke down when Patrick would not agree to DeLeo's demand that two slots-only operations be granted to former race tracks without going to bid.

The coalition's website says it supports three casinos and Lang said it would also support slots-only operations that are competitively bid. But the group wants a bill passed and signed early in the legislative session, he said.

"We want the Legislature to focus on this bill — hopefully to get the governor, the speaker and the Senate president in a room — and try and come up with a consensus," he said.

Lang said two valuable New Bedford development sites — the former NStar power plant and Revere Copper and Brass factory — have been tied up waiting for possible casino development for four years.

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The state "once and for all" needs the construction jobs and casino and support-industry jobs that destination-casinos would bring, he said.

Alves said the state needs to ask soon; Rhode Island is exploring expanding the Twin Rivers slots site to a full casino.

"Massachusetts is going to be left with too little, too late," he said.

The coalition letter contended the Massachusetts construction industry is currently beset by 60 percent unemployment; that thousands of jobs (the average ones paying \$45,000 with benefits) would be created by the casinos, and that the licensing fees and new tax revenue would relieve recession-caused revenue losses that are causing the state's 351 cities and towns to make "drastic cuts" in personnel and services.

And the state's "struggling" hospitality and convention industries have been "cannibalized" by the casinos in Southeastern Connecticut, the letter stated.

"As long as it's highly regulated, as long as it's not a situation where we're giving out (licenses) without competition ... I think it would make some sense," Lang said.

The letter was released late in the afternoon and officials with the governor's office, House speaker and Senate president could not be reached for comment.

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