

Maryland's casino-gambling ballot measure: The big questions about Question 7

Written by Administrator

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The story from opponents, whose ads are airing at least as often, is much different. They tell viewers that the claims of politicians cannot be trusted and that “no new money is required for education” under the Nov. 6 ballot measure, which would “cut taxes for billionaire special interests.”

Feeling confused? You're not alone.

That's because neither [deep-pocketed side](#) is telling the full truth about Question 7, which would allow for a Las Vegas-style casino in Prince George's as early as 2016, as well as [table games such as blackjack and roulette](#) at Maryland's five previously authorized slots venues, probably starting next year.

Here's a look at some of the big questions about the ballot measure, without any spin.

If Question 7 passes, how much money would be generated for education?

Let's back up just a bit.

Currently, five slots sites are authorized in Maryland, three of which are open. As things stand now, nonpartisan legislative staff estimate the program will generate about \$260 million this year for education and expect that figure to grow to around \$580 million over the next four years.

In August, the General Assembly [approved gambling legislation](#) that calls for a public vote on a sixth casino — in Prince George's — and table games.

If Question 7 passes, legislative staff estimate the expansion plan will generate an additional \$60 million for education during the next fiscal year. That amount would gradually increase to

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\$199 million by fiscal year 2019.

That's the figure supporters cite in their ads and other campaign material. But not all of that money is tied to passage of Question 7. That's because some provisions in the legislature's law expanding gambling do not require voter approval.

One of those is altering the state's current practice of [buying slot machines for the private casino owners](#). When lawmakers launched the slots program in 2007, many thought state ownership of machines would reduce the odds of fraud — but the policy has come at a very high price.

By requiring larger casinos to procure their own machines, by 2019 the state is expected to save \$36 million a year, money that will instead flow to education — even if the ballot measure fails.

If you back out that number and others from the \$199 million, you are left with about \$150 million a year in education funding from passage of Question 7.

Of course, that's just an estimate of how much additional revenue the casinos would generate, and some state estimates have been off in the past.

For this fiscal year, for example, less than half as much education money is projected from slots as was the case in 2007, when lawmakers approved the program — about \$260 million compared with a forecast of \$660 million. Much of the drop-off is due to [casinos taking longer than expected to open and to the sour economy](#)

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