

Casino gambling: A loser for New York

Written by Administrator
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Gov. Cuomo and legislators are poised to amend our Constitution to allow casino gambling in New York. If they pass the measure, a statewide referendum this November will place final approval in the hands of voters. Before our state takes this almost certainly irreversible step, we need to take a hard, sober look at what this will mean for our communities and individual taxpayers.

The creation of new casinos and an ever-wider array of gambling options are sold to the public mainly as economic development. This sales pitch is fatally flawed. Gambling generates almost no new economic activity; it only takes it from somewhere else.

The casinos' elaborate shell game dupes existing businesses — those that create tangible goods or provide genuine services — by luring them with false promises of new customers and spinoff economic activity. In reality, casinos are designed to draw people in and then *keep them there* with cheap or free food, alcohol and entertainment.

Neighborhood businesses don't stand a chance. Instead of job creators with spinoff benefits, casinos become a black hole that sucks in a community's economic activity and devours surrounding small businesses.

Big-government advocates are always looking for ways to find new taxes to feed their mounting budgets. Gambling revenue — which Warren Buffett has called a “tax on ignorance” — is increasingly where governments have turned. A recent study by the Rockefeller Institute found that state governments' revenue from gambling hit \$24 billion in 2010.

Once, governments regulated gambling; now they're in virtual partnership with the gambling industry. The goal? Separate citizens from more and more of their hard-earned money with glitzy ad campaigns promising an easy road to riches.

This taxation by exploitation is an especially insidious way to raise revenue.

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But doesn't the money go to support education? That's what we were promised when New York amended its Constitution in the 1960s to allow the lottery, yet the facts speak for themselves. Despite more than four decades of growing lottery revenues, as of 2010 New Yorkers paid the highest state and local taxes in the nation. More revenue from new casinos won't yield lower taxes — but will surely result in more government spending.

Gambling isn't a victimless vice. Crime, bankruptcy and broken homes are all well documented effects of increased "gaming" activity. And it's not just the pathological gamblers and their unfortunate families and friends who suffer: We all do.

Every time the police respond to a robbery, the courts have to pursue a creditor or social services has to remove children from an abusive, unhealthy home — we all pay. It's the taxpayers who always end up stuck with the bill.

Even now, the National Council on Problem Gambling has estimated the cost that this vice imposes on New York state taxpayers at nearly \$400 million a year.

Shuttered businesses, higher taxes and spending, more crime: The reasons not to allow casino gambling in New York are compelling and many. Instead, we should focus our efforts on real job creation, lower taxes, less spending and growth industries that don't exploit the worst of human nature.

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