

Written by Administrator

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In addition to providing \$30 million for education, Question 1 on the ballot includes a one percent share of casino profits for harness horsemen and one percent for standardbred owners and breeders in the state. That's expected to be more than a million dollars each year. But Chandler Woodcock,

executive director of the 800-member Maine Harness Horsemen's Association is opposed to the measure. He joined the president of the Maine Standardbred Breeders and Owners Association and representatives of Hollywood Slots at a news conference in Augusta.

"This Oxford casino project threatens the future of our industry by restricting other projects, which may include a harness racing facility as part of their proposal," Woodcock said.

Case in point: a proposed racino in Biddeford, where the owners of the Scarborough Downs harness racing track would like to relocate, rebuild and include slot machines, much the way Hollywood Slots in Bangor currently operates near the state's only other harness racing track.

Because Biddeford is within a 100-mile radius of Oxford County--and because state law currently prohibits any Maine gaming facility from opening within 100 miles of an existing one--a Biddeford racino could potentially be left at the starting gate if the Oxford casino is approved.

"With the horsemen and the fair association--I can't understand why they would be against Yes On One and our project," says Rob Lally, the treasurer for the group "Maine Taxpayers Taking Charge" and one of several Maine business owners investing in the Oxford County casino.

Lally says he can't figure out why the horsemen would be opposed unless they want a larger share of the profits. "We're promising to create over 2,700 new jobs, and it seems to me that when people have jobs and have good jobs like the ones we're proposing, isn't that better for harness racing and the entire state of Maine? Because people with jobs have incomes they can spend on goods and services in the state of Maine."

But horsemen and women don't like the fact that, as written, the Oxford proposal prohibits the Hollywood Slots racino from ever offering table games. And they don't like the fact that the Oxford casino does not include a harness racing track.

They also see competition in Oxford as a drain on Hollywood Slots, which is their bread and

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butter. Catherine Damren, executive director of the Maine Association of Agricultural Fairs, says fairs are not opposed to an expansion of casinos or racinos, but she worries that without a Biddeford racino, the future of Scarborough Downs would be in doubt.

And Maine's 26 fairs rely, in part, on the track for their funding. "If we lost the commercial track, this would really restrict the amount of monies that the fairs are able to use to give their exhibitors, premiums to support 4-H, and we hope that you do not support the referendum as it's proposed," Damren said.

Rob Lally and other casino proponents point out that the same 100-mile restriction that the horsemen are complaining about was written into state law to protect Hollywood Slots from competition in the first place.

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