

York County casino backers say project promises millions for Maine

Written by Administrator

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The campaign behind the York County casino referendum said Thursday that the project would create thousands of jobs and boost the state's economy.

Progress for Maine released an economic analysis late Thursday afternoon prepared by the Florida-based consulting firm Evans, Carroll & Associates that says voter approval of the casino in November would result in:

n 2,165 permanent jobs and 2,767 construction jobs.

n \$6.1 million from lodging in the 150-room hotel in the first year.

n \$64.4 million in new household earnings from operation of the casino, and more than \$100 million in household earnings from construction.

n At least \$45 million a year in tax revenue for the state.

In a written statement, Progress for Maine called Evans, Carroll & Associates a leading economic forecaster hired by states such as New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin to study the impact of policy changes on topics ranging from infrastructure to utility allowances. The cities of Las Vegas and Orlando have hired the firm to conduct gaming, travel and tourism studies, the statement said.

The firm has come under scrutiny recently for maps it drew up for The Kushner Cos. that helped the family of President Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner qualify one of its buildings for a federal investment program designed to help struggling areas, The Associated Press reported.

The building in question is located in a bustling New Jersey waterfront area that looks out at the Manhattan skyline, and the specific census tract where the Kushner Cos.' building was located

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had an unemployment rate that averaged 1.3 percent.

But Evans, Carroll & Associates created an oddly shaped map that included several high unemployment areas several miles away that had an overall unemployment rate of 9.8 percent – high enough to qualify for the investment program.

Critics have faulted the investment program for failing to bring investment into poor communities as intended, the AP report said. By gerrymandering together rich geographic areas with poor ones, developers have managed to win approval from economic development authorities for luxury projects in Manhattan, California's Beverly Hills and Miami's South Beach.

A spokesman for O'Neill and Associates, a public relations firm representing Progress for Maine, declined to comment Thursday.

While economists and Maine state officials have yet to respond to Evans, Carroll & Associates' York County estimates, no one has disputed that a casino in York County has the potential to bring in significant revenues. State officials have estimated that a voter-approved license to build a casino in York County would be worth as much as \$200 million to the man who would receive it.

The referendum in November would give [exclusive rights to develop a casino](#) to international gambling entrepreneur Shawn Scott or a company owned by him. The casino would have to be built in York County, in a community that agrees to accept it.

The campaign remains under intense scrutiny by [two government ethics panels](#) that want more information about who is backing the project and who would profit from it. Earlier this month, Progress for Maine unveiled a new campaign website that had drawings of what the casino might look like – a lobster-themed building featuring a lighthouse.

Scott was behind the initiative that won voter approval to add slot machines to Bangor's struggling horse track in 2003, bringing Maine its first casino. Scott then sold those rights to Penn National – which still operates what is now Bangor's successful Hollywood Casino – for

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\$51 million as regulators scrutinized his businesses and associates.

The push for the York County casino has been fraught with controversy. An initial petition drive fell short in 2015 after the Secretary of State's Office invalidated many of the signed petitions. The campaign was forced to collect additional signatures, and in 2016 it cleared the threshold for getting on the ballot.

State Rep. Louis Luchini, R-Ellsworth, the House chairman of the Legislature's Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, which has oversight of casino gambling in Maine, and the committee's co-chairman Sen. Garrett Mason, R-Lisbon, have opposed the ballot initiative. Luchini has criticized the website, saying it was "filled with empty promises."

Penelope Overton can be contacted at:

[\[email protected\]](#)

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