

Written by Administrator  
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By JONATHAN J. COOPER

PORTLAND, Ore.

Oregon voters approved a potentially costly proposal to create mandatory minimum sentences for repeat drunken drivers and serious sex offenders, while turning down a proposal to build a casino near Portland.

The sentencing measure's main

backer -- Salem lawyer and former Republican gubernatorial candidate Kevin Mannix -- says it is worth any cost to protect Oregon residents from lawbreakers.

But the bill could be expensive: A state financial impact estimate says it will cost between \$18 million and \$29 million per year after four years. The proposal overcame opposition by the Republican and Democratic gubernatorial candidates, labor unions and organizations fighting domestic violence.

"This is the fifth citizens' initiative on crime reduction I've passed," said Mannix, whose Measure 11 in 1994 created tough mandatory sentences for violent offenders but is blamed by critics for swelling the state's corrections budget. "I'm an ace."

Tribal casinos cheered the rejection of the casino measure, which would have created put a casino outside Portland to compete with tribal casinos located much farther from the state's largest metro area.

A Canadian investment firm sunk \$2 million into a campaign asking voters to create a single exception to Oregon's ban on private casinos.

Vocal opponents said the casino would send money out of Oregon. They argued it would harm

the state lottery and take business from tribal casinos that rely on gambling income to pay for government services.

"We're excited Oregon voters sent a resounding message to foreign corporations and out-of-state investors that we don't need a private gambling monopoly here in Oregon," said Justin Martin, a spokesman for the Oregon Tribal Gaming Alliance, which represents the nine Oregon Indian tribes that operate casinos.

Toronto-based Clairvest Investment Group Inc., had planned to bankroll the \$250 million casino and entertainment venue at the site of the former Multnomah Kennel Club in Wood Village.

The plan was the brainchild of two Lake Oswego businessmen who argued the casino would create jobs and generate revenue for state and local government. One of them, attorney Matt Rossman, said Tuesday night that statewide casino ballot measures often fail on their first attempt. He said he hopes to improve the measure and try again in two years.

"We had a ballot measure that faced a lot of hurdles along the way," Rossman said.

He said the casino would have kept Oregon gambling dollars from going to La Center, Wash., where the Cowlitz Tribe wants to build a casino along Interstate 5 to tap the lucrative Portland market.

Voters also approved a ballot measure requiring the Legislature to meet every year and another making low-interest home loans available to more military veterans. Voters also approved proposal that extends a state law dedicating 15 percent of lottery proceeds to parks, beaches, wildlife habitat and watershed protection.

A proposal to change the state's medical marijuana program was rejected. It would have created nonprofit marijuana dispensaries for patients with cards allowing them to use the drug for medical purposes, allowing state-licensed growers and retail stores to sell marijuana and pay state fees of 10 percent of their income.

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An estimated 42,000 to 43,000 people legally use marijuana for health reasons in Oregon, which has a population of about 3.8 million.

Voters approved a measure authorizing exceptions to the state's \$50,000 borrowing limit for certain projects funded by bonds.

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