

Nebraska voters to decide on legalizing casino gambling

Written by Administrator
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LINCOLN, Neb. (KOLN) - Nebraska voters will be able to vote on legalizing casino gambling in the state. Voters will see three separate initiatives related to casino gambling: Initiative 429, 430 and 431. Initiative 429 would change the Nebraska constitution to allow games of chance at licensed horse tracks. Initiative 430 creates a gaming commission and 431 details the gaming tax breakdown.

According to initiative 431, casino gambling in Nebraska would be taxed at a 20% rate. 70% of that tax dollar will go towards property tax relief if passed.

CEO of the Lincoln Racecourse Mike Newlin said, "We have a real solution and a real way to create new revenue for property tax relief."

According to the [Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission](#), Iowa collected around \$325 million in casino gambling taxes at its casinos last year. Based on a percentage of Iowa's tax revenue, Nebraska could collect \$93 million from the potential six casinos at licensed horse tracks in casino gambling tax with around \$65 million going to property tax relief.

Newlin said, "I think that everyone that owns property in the state of Nebraska across the state would be happy to not have their property taxes go up anymore."

But, opponents of the initiatives, like Nate Grasz of the Nebraska Family Alliance, feel there is more to it.

"Casinos don't lower taxes because that's not what they're designed to do. Casinos create social costs that are paid for by all taxpayers," Grasz said.

Recent public health studies from the [North American Foundation for Gambling Addiction Help](#), over \$6 billion nationally is used to help combat compulsive gambling. The [American Gaming Association](#) said it collected around \$41.7 billion in casino gambling revenue. in 2018.

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Grasz said, "There's no debate that casinos rely on blatantly exploiting the poor and the vulnerable."

Data from [Iowa's Department of Public Health](#) found 74% of its population gambled in 2018. 60% are considered not at risk while 14% are at risk. The data shows at-risk gamblers are likely unmarried or have low income and education levels. The same study found 61% of at-risk gamblers said they have poor mental health. That's in comparison to non-at-risk gamblers who said 46% have poor mental health.

"When you expand gambling, you expand the social costs of gambling along with it," Grasz said. "Areas with casinos see increases in addiction, bankruptcy, crime and broken families."

But, Newlin argues we are already paying those social costs.

"We have the social costs because it's our Nebraska residents that are driving 10 minutes to go to an Iowa casino."

Although these sides differ in opinion, it'll be up to voters to decide on election day. Newlin said the most important measure is initiative 429. If the other two are not voted for, he fears it'll allow the Nebraska Legislature to set the tax rate and possibly set it too high.

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