

One day after Pa. casino execs send a letter to Wolf pushing to stay open, he shuts them down

Written by Administrator

Thursday, 10 December 2020 19:44 -

Despite a plea from Penn National Gaming to keep casinos open, [Gov. Tom Wolf went ahead with his anticipated temporary shutdown announcement Thursday](#), saying no dice to the entertainment industry for the remainder of 2020 and into early 2021.

His order requires casinos, along with theaters, concert venues, museums, movie theaters, arcades, bowling alleys, private clubs, and all other similar entertainment operations to cease operating as of 12:01 a.m. on Dec. 12 and ending at 8 a.m. on Jan. 4.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has marked movie theaters and other indoor settings as “higher-risk activities” for contracting the virus. The number of positive COVID-19 cases continue to climb in Pennsylvania.

On Wednesday, nine gaming executives representing their respective casinos in the commonwealth sent Wolf a letter asking him to rethink his decision.

“Our industry is one of the largest and most successful in the state,” the letter noted. “We generate more than \$1.5 billion in annual tax revenues and invest more than \$500 million in goods and services every year with businesses across the Commonwealth. Logistically, it is not feasible that we close our casinos’ doors within a few days’ notice. A casino is a massive business enterprise, and we are required to secure thousands of individual gaming devices; and move substantial sums of cash off-premises among other challenges.”

The nine executives oversee Live! Casino and Hotel Philadelphia, Meadows Racetrack & Casino, Lady Luck Casino Nemaquin, Wind Creek Bethlehem, Live! Casino Pittsburgh, Mohegan Sun Pocono, Parx Casino, Hollywood Casino at Penn National Race Course, and Presque Isle Downs & Casino.

Closing down Penn National’s casinos will affect 18,000 employees and thousands of business partners, according to the letter. Penn National Gaming said it has adhered to guidance from Wolf’s administration, the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board’s COVID-19 protocols.

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Additionally, executives noted that Pennsylvania State Police troopers have maintained a “continuous presence in every casino in this state, a level of oversight that is simply not matched in any other business or industry in the Commonwealth.”

“Collectively, we have invested tens of millions of dollars to install every safeguard imaginable,” the letter stated. “We have trained staff to follow and enforce extensive safety protocols.”

The letter continued: “There is no evidence that casinos are a source of COVID-19 spread. We all understand that one case is one too many. However, forcing our properties to close would ignore this record, our investments, and our commitment to strictly enforce all protocols.”

As part of the COVID-19 mitigation order, the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board announced it would work with the 12 operating casinos on closing procedures.

Under the order, the following casinos will cease all gaming activities and patron entry:

- Harrah’s Philadelphia
- Hollywood Casino at Penn National Race Course
- Lady Luck Nemacolin
- Live! Casino Pittsburgh
- Meadows Casino and Racetrack
- Mohegan Sun Pocono
- Mount Airy Casino Resort
- Parx Casino
- Presque Isle Racetrack and Casino
- Rivers Pittsburgh
- Valley Forge Casino and Resort
- Wind Creek Bethlehem

Rivers Casino Philadelphia had already closed on Nov. 20 in accordance with an order from the City of Philadelphia.

“The Board is continuously monitoring developments and will update licensees and the public

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as frequently as possible with any new developments,” Gaming Control Board Executive Director Kevin O’Toole says.

The closures do not affect other forms of gaming regulated by the [Gaming Control Board offered via the internet](#) including casino-type games, sports wagering, and fantasy contests.

As casinos plan to turn off their games, theaters and bowling alleys, which are often frequented during the holidays, are prepared to close their doors for three weeks, too.

“We were bracing for it,” said Midtown Cinema’s Director of Community Engagement Stuart London. “And, we know it’s the right thing to do for our commonwealth.”

London, who is also the producing artistic director at Open Stage, said the entertainment industry has been feeling the economic pinch since the “great intermission” began in March. But, he said he believes this short sacrifice is the turning point back to stability once the vaccine begins to save lives.

“Every month is an important month in the entertainment business,” London said. “Midtown Cinema is down about 70 percent in our normal budget year. We have had to furlough some wonderful, fantastic human beings. It’s been a tough time. Honestly, as tough as it will be to go into another shutdown for these weeks, I know that when we get to the other side of this situation, I hope we have a stronger business because of it.”

Grateful for the Paycheck Protection Program funds that helped them to stay afloat, London said he thinks there are positive lessons learned from the pandemic.

He said he is hopeful that businesses, especially those hit hardest, will develop creative measures going forward that will help them to quickly recoup lost funds from the nearly yearlong challenge.

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