

TRENTON — If the casino industry is to benefit from a new government-supported Atlantic City Tourism District, it will come at a price.

Subsidies for racetrack purses that could save the 2011 horse racing season were tucked inside the tourism district

legislation and other bills that cleared a state Assembly committee Thursday. If the bills become law, they call for \$15 million from the casinos to pass through the state Casino Reinvestment Development Authority and go into next year's horse racing purses. Another \$15 million in total would follow the same route over the next two years, with state lawmakers saying the subsidies will act as bridge money until other revenue sources kick in for the horse industry.

The package, however, includes plenty of sweeteners for the casinos, including sharp deregulation, establishment of a special police detail to patrol the tourism district, and millions of dollars for marketing.

All that helps make the trade-off with the horse racing industry more palatable, said Joseph Corbo, a Casino Association of New Jersey board member.

"We support this legislation," Corbo said during a hearing by the Assembly Regulatory and Oversight Committee. "You don't get to pick and choose which parts you like. Being very self-motivated, I think we can spend the (money earmarked for horse racing) on things rather than horse racing, but that's part of the compromise."

A full Assembly vote on the proposals sponsored by Democrats could take place next week. However, getting the support of Gov. Chris Christie is questionable.

On Nov. 23, Christie said racing-friendly legislators were running an end-around by looking for a way to replace the former \$30 million annual subsidy paid by the casinos to horse racing purses. Christie said the subsidies would not continue.

"The bringing together of the horse-racing issue and the Atlantic City issue doesn't make sense," Christie said.

But the chairman of the Assembly committee that cleared the bills, John J. Burzichelli, D-Gloucester, said efforts have been focused on keeping the entire gaming industry sustainable.

"The casino and horse racing industries are two backbones of New Jersey. They create jobs and spark economic development in many, many ways, and we must ensure they remain strong and competitive economic engines for generations to come," Burzichelli said.

The committee also advanced bills that would allow Internet gambling and sports betting at casinos and racetracks, and promoting in-state racehorse breeding. The sports betting measure would also need statewide approval of voters and have to overcome federal hurdles.

Casino legislation advances - Cherry Hill Courier Post

Written by Administrator

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