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Casinos, Monson, Palmer, Statehouse, Talk »

Former Monson selectman Kathleen Norbut tells Statehouse hearing casinos will only help developers, investors and casino operators

By Dan Ring
February 25, 2010, 8:15PM

This is an 8:15 p.m. update of a story posted at 9:55 this morning.

BOSTON – The leader of an anti-casino group told state legislators on Thursday that casinos will drain money from the state, ruin local businesses and create more gambling addicts.

Speaking at an event to help mobilize opposition ahead of a possible upcoming vote on expanded gaming, Kathleen C. Norbut of Monson, president of United to Stop Slots in Massachusetts, told about 50 people at the Statehouse that gambling money will only aid developers, investors and casino owners.

"When casinos win, communities lose," said Norbut, a former Monson selectman who lives about 10 miles from a proposed casino in Palmer. Rep. Denise Provost, D-Somerville, said she hosted the event party to organize critics of casinos.

House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo, D-Winthrop, told reporters on Tuesday that he hopes the full House of Representatives could vote on casinos before a debate on the state budget for the fiscal year that starts July 1. DeLeo said he would take the wraps off his proposed casino bill in about two or three weeks.

According to a spokesman for DeLeo, Spectrum Gaming Group of Linwood, N.J. is also currently completing a market analysis on how to maximize the benefits of any gaming bill. Spectrum completed a 2008 study on Gov. Deval L. Patrick's failed bill for three casino resorts, but DeLeo and Patrick have said that study may need to be updated because of the downturn in the economy.

Seth Gitell, a spokesman for DeLeo, said the speaker's bill will include provisions to deal with an expected increase in gambling addicts if the state legalizes casinos and slot machines.

DeLeo has said his bill would call for slot machines for the state's tracks and two or three casino resorts around the state.

"At a time like this, the first priority should be jobs," Gitell said. "Slots will get people working in the short term and the long term."

The Mohegan Sun in Connecticut is also emphasizing job creation. The company is planning a resort casino in Palmer across from Exit 8 on the Massachusetts Turnpike.

Jeffrey E. Hartmann, chief operating officer of the Mohegan Sun, has said that the company's proposed site in Palmer is ideal for a resort casino because 14 million adults live within a two-hour drive. He said the Palmer casino would create 1,000 construction jobs and up to 3,000 permanent jobs.

Norbut, in a Powerpoint report, said that for every \$1 generated by casinos, it costs taxpayers \$3 to deal with increased crime, bankruptcies and other negative effects.

She said many new jobs simply replace jobs that are destroyed when restaurants and other businesses lose customers to casinos. She cited a study that found 70 percent of independent restaurants closed in Atlantic City, N.J. within the first year casinos opened in that city.

She compared casinos to tobacco companies, saying both need to attract new addicts to bring in new revenue.

One House member who supports expanded gaming, Rep. Kathi-Anne Reinstein, D-Revere, told Norbut that the state is losing revenues because thousands of people are gambling at casinos in other states.

Reinstein said opponents are failing to offer alternatives to create jobs.

"What do we do about working-class men and women who have been out of work?" Reinstein said.

Several legislators said it's too difficult to predict the outcome of the upcoming vote in the House on the speaker's bill.

"It's in flux," Provost said. "People are looking for information."

Two years ago, the state House of Representatives voted 108-46 to defeat Patrick's bill for three casino resorts. That means DeLeo would need to flip several dozen votes.

"It's hard for people to turn their votes around," said Rep. William N. Brownsberger, D-Belmont. "I don't think the world has changed that much."



Kathleen C. Norbut

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