



GREATER MANCHESTER CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

SPONSORED BY:



ATTORNEYS AT LAW

Sheehan Phinney Bass + Green



POWERED BY:



SPONSOR INSIGHT

EYE ON POLITICS

EDITORIAL TEAM

CHAMBER INSIGHT

SPONSOR INSIGHT:

While "legislative crossover" has been completed and House and Senate bills have been killed or passed on from the original body to the second for further consideration, one issue remains alive yet has not moved forward. Slot machine gambling as a State revenue source was recently debated in committee as well as on the floor of the Senate and subsequently "laid on the table".

SB306 An act relative to allowing gaming in Coos County, building a casino in Berlin and establishing a fund to assist with payment of property taxes, and SB 330 An act relative to video lottery machines at certain pari-mutual facilities were heard by the Senate Ways and Means Committee. After lengthy testimony from the public, the committee made a recommendation to the full Senate that the bills be found inexpedient to legislate. On the floor of the Senate a lengthy debate resulted in the bills being laid on the table. This is a move that is intended to preserve the issue for consideration at some point in the future.

These bills or others quite similar have been proposed almost every year for at least the last 15 years. The legislature has consistently opposed the notion that gambling will fill the State coffers without endangering our present quality of life.

Throughout the last few weeks the debate surrounding expanding gambling has heated the halls of the State House. Sen. Lou D'Allesandro, the perennial sponsor of this legislation, spoke of his bill as an economic development and job creation package. It is his belief that Rockingham Park and the other racetrack venues favored in the bill would have to invest upward of \$720,000 in construction costs to accommodate the numbers of slot machines proposed. The Senator and his co-sponsors believe that some 4,000 union jobs would be created at the tracks through this effort. SB330 has a complex licensing and revenue sharing plan which would charge both application and licensing fees. The plan proposes the State will receive 42% of the net machine income and thus provide \$250,000,000 to the state annually.

Other proponents speaking at the hearing included Edward Foley of the NH Building Trade Council who believes that the construction jobs possible through these proposals would help the NH workforce at a time when things are slow, several residents of Berlin who see SB306 as economic aid to the North Country, and some employees of the Seabrook Yankee Greyhound Track in Seabrook who see their union workforce shrinking and believe that the bills would be helpful in reversing that trend.

There were a number of members of the public speaking out at the hearing in opposition

to these bills. The NH Restaurant and Lodging Association sent several members who spoke to the losses they believed would come to the tourism industry if the State decided to seek revenue from slot machine casinos. Alex Ray, the owner of the Common Man Restaurants, stated that the NH advantage of vacationing families, the beauty, culture and lifestyle would fade in the presence of slot machine giants who would provide food, drink and accommodations for gamblers and drive NH businesses out. He cited the experiences of many states where this had occurred.

The Catholic Diocese of Manchester spoke in opposition to both bills. Diane Quinlan Murphy represented Bishop McCormack noting that the Church's interest in the bills arose out of the belief that those who are in the greatest need, the poor and vulnerable, should be the priority of those making economic and social policy. While the Church does not view gambling as morally unacceptable, the behavior that accompanies gambling can result in deprivation of the basic needs of persons, often the poor, harming children and families.

The Law Enforcement community was represented by Attorney General Kelly Ayotte who spoke strongly of her belief that expanded gambling in the form of slot machines would come with huge social costs. She spoke of the volume of published evidence showing serious violence and property increases in communities where these types of slot machine casinos are located. Chief Magnant of the Portsmouth Police Department, representing the N.H. Chiefs of Police, added to the AG's testimony speaking to the peer review studies and practical experience that point to the real losses that come to states that look to gambling expansion as a revenue source. Those real losses would take hold and would be realized through reduced tourism business and increased crime in NH.

Former State Senator Jim Rubens, the chairman of the Granite State Coalition Against the Expansion of Gambling, talked of the ten year old organization comprised of many diverse groups in the State all of whom oppose the introduction of slot machine casinos. He talked of the drain of money from the economy of N.H., which would have to occur in order for these venues to be successful.

As the legislation stands now the discussion will rise and fall with the financial needs of the State. Those who have a feeling about the benefits or detriment of expanded gambling as a revenue source for N.H. should contact their legislator.

Liz Murphy
Sheehan Phinney Capitol Group
lmurphy@sheehan.com

CHAMBER INSIGHT:

Legislative Session Reaches Halfway Point

With 2 ½ months down and roughly 2 more to go, legislative action has reached a fever pitch in Concord. Several key Chamber issues have been acted on during the last several weeks. Here is a recap of the status of those key issues:

Education Funding – CACR 34 has passed the Senate and a public hearing was held in House Finance just this week. The GMCC supports any constitutional amendment that allows for the targeting of aid, among other criteria. CACR 34 does meet all the criteria and the GMCC plans to ask our local Representatives to support the measure in order to give NH voters a chance to weigh in this November.

HB 1404 – This bill creates a \$75 million dollar liability cap for commuter rail operations by the NH Rail Transit Authority. The GMCC strongly supports this measure as it is a critical step in moving the rail project forward. Every major rail system in the country has some sort of liability cap in place. HB 1404 recently passed the House by a unanimous voice vote and now heads to the Senate for further consideration. The GMCC plans to strongly advocate in favor of this bill to all 24 State Senators.

HB 1434 – This bill, also known as RGGI, enables NH to formally enter a regional cap and trade program aimed at lowering greenhouse gas emissions. While GMCC agrees with overall goal of this bill, we do have some concerns with the current language and potential consequences it may have on the business community, particularly manufacturers. The bill recently passed the House and is now in the Senate. The GMCC will continue to monitor this legislation and see whether the Senate seeks any changes in the current language.

HB 1472 – This bill is a workforce housing measure that seeks to clarify the definition of “workforce housing,” codifies existing case law, and adds an accelerated appeals mechanism to the municipal review process. The GMCC strongly supports this and other workforce housing measures as providing adequate housing choices for our workforce is critical to the NH’s economic future. HB 1472 passed the House by a small margin and now heads to the Senate for further review. The Senate acted favorably on two similar bills which may be good news for HB 1472.

HB 1587 – This bill drastically expands privacy rules and standards for patient medical records. The GMCC opposed HB 1587 as the bill would lead to less efficient and more expensive medical care during a time when Health Care costs are already increasing significantly. The GMCC greatly values personal privacy and security, but feels the current HIPPA standards are more than adequate. HB 1587 failed to pass the House and was referred to study.

SB 342 & SB 421 – These two bills are companion bills to HB 1472 and accomplish the same thing. The GMCC supports both measures and each passed the Senate by a 23 to 1 vote.

SB 540 – Formally SB 391, SB 540 is now the “HealthFirst” initiative supported by the Governor and Insurance Department. While the GMCC strongly supports the goal of this bill to promote a healthy workforce and lower premiums for small business, the GMCC believes the current language is too flawed to support. SB 540 needs language that guarantees an actuarial review of the small business product it creates, and expansion of the membership of the advisory committee. The bill also needs to ensure it does not negatively impact competition in the insurer marketplace, thus driving companies out of state rather than attracting them. The bill has passed the Senate and now moves to House Commerce for consideration. The GMCC plans to work with House members to see language improvements that meet these concerns.

As always, please feel free to contact the Chamber with any questions. Remember, the GMCC is here to be your business advocate and your voice in Concord. In order for us to do so effectively, we need feedback from you! Please direct any questions to michaels@manchester-chamber.org or call (603) 792-4107.

Michael Skelton

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

michaels@manchester-chamber.org

EYE ON POLITICS:

NH State Legislature www.state.nh.us

The Union Leader www.theunionleader.com/

NH Primary Info www.nhprimary.com

EDITORIAL TEAM:

Brad Cook

Sheehan, Phinney, Bass, + Green, P.A.

bcook@sheehan.com

Bruce Berke

Sheehan Phinney Capitol Group

bberke@sheehan.com

Valerie Acres

Sheehan Phinney Capitol Group

vacres@sheehan.com

Henry Veilleux

Sheehan Phinney Capitol Group

hveilleux@sheehan.com

Liz Murphy

Sheehan Phinney Capitol Group

lmurphy@sheehan.com

Erle Pierce

Pierce Public Affairs, LLC

epierce@sheehan.com

Michael Skelton

Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce

889 Elm Street , Third Floor

Manchester , New Hampshire 03101

michaels@manchester-chamber.org

603-666-6600 ext. 107