

Money flowing out of N.J. can be kept here

By **RAYMOND LESNIAK** • For the Courier-Post • December 19, 2010

"I am shocked, shocked to find that gambling is going on in here!"

Truer words were never spoken than this famous line from one of the greatest movies of all time -- Casablanca.

Open the sports pages of any newspaper or listen to or watch any sports show on the radio or TV to find out the "line" or the "over/under" and the multitude of opinions on the best bet.

Captain Renault wasn't fooling anyone and neither is the NFL in opposing legalized sports betting, except the federal government, which deprives New Jersey of the revenues from sports betting that are now going to Las Vegas, Delaware and the local bookie who is often hooked up with organized crime.

The same is true for online gaming likewise prohibited by federal law. New Jersey has 500,000 registered online poker players. Who's profiting from their gambling? Offshore operations. Foreign companies and foreign countries. Sound stupid? You bet it is (pun intended).

When the Denver Broncos played the San Francisco 49ers last month in London, bets were taken across the street from the stadium, but not in the United States, unless you were in Las Vegas or Delaware. More stupidity.

Everyone seems to be taking this lying down -- including our governor. Either they don't care enough or believe it's too difficult to fight against the federal government. Not me. Not this kid of Polish ancestry who grew up in the toughest sections of Elizabeth. I had to learn to fight for what was right and I haven't forgotten those lessons.

Club CalNeva, a Las Vegas-based company which operates over 30 sports books and handles billions of dollars in bets estimates that sports betting will bring in \$1.3 billion in gross wagering revenues and \$120 million in tax revenues for New Jersey. That's \$1.3 billion of gross profits for our casinos and racetracks, creating and keeping thousands of jobs and attracting tourists to Atlantic City and the

Jersey shore.

That's a lot of jobs, a lot of profits for New Jersey businesses, and a lot of revenue for the state.

And that's why I have filed a lawsuit in federal district court to overturn the federal ban on sports betting which gives an unfair and unconstitutional advantage to Nevada and Delaware at the expense of New Jersey and other states. Constitutional law authorities at George Washington, Vanderbilt, Willamette and Whittier law schools agree that the federal ban violates the Fifth, 10th and 14th amendments of the U.S. Constitution and its Commerce Clause. Even the Justice Department had doubts on the legality of the sports betting ban and expressed its concern in a letter to then-chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Joe Biden.

And that's why I've also sponsored legislation to legalize online gaming, limited exclusively to New Jersey residents, to avoid the federal ban on interstate Internet gaming. Econsult, nationally recognized for its economic analysis of government operations, estimates the gross revenues to our casinos from this legislation will exceed \$200 million with at least \$30 million going into our state treasury, and \$16 million going to programs to benefit seniors and the disabled in the Garden State. I'm talking about found money; cash that's now going to Las Vegas or Delaware, to offshore companies and foreign countries, or to organized crime, being captured by New Jersey businesses to create profits, jobs and revenues for our residents and our state. It doesn't get any better than that.

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State Sen. Raymond Lesniak, D-Union, is chairman of the state Senate Economic Growth Committee.

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