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US REGULATION

New Jersey Sports Betting Referendum in November

By Joan Peppin - casinoadvisor.com

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In New Jersey, the much publicized and much awaited sports betting referendum will be held on November 8. This has also rekindled public interest in the online gambling bill and in the issue of slots machines at race tracks. A detailed article appeared over the weekend in NJ.com.

Both Republican and Democratic lawmakers in New Jersey are seeking to overturn the federal Professional Amateur Sports Protection Act. This Act bans sports wagering throughout the United States, except in specified jurisdictions. New Jersey legislators want to permit regulated sports betting in order to generate tax revenue from this activity. This, however, is a long drawn process that requires changes to the state's constitution. In order to enable the changes, a referendum of state residents will be required, and this will be held on November 8. If the sports betting referendum passes then appropriate legislation will have to be framed and passed. The Senate State Government, Wagering, Tourism and Historic Preservation Committee is already drafting a bill to allow betting on non-college sports teams at Atlantic City casinos and at two specified race tracks. The bill will have to be passed by both the Senate and the House in New Jersey and then signed into law by the governor. The governor had earlier this year vetoed the online gambling bill. He had also opposed the sports betting proposal on the grounds that it is against federal law. However, all this may change if there is overwhelming support for sports betting in the November referendum. Only after the sports betting law is enacted could the state of New Jersey go to court in an attempt to overturn the federal ban.

The casino and horse racing executives clearly support the introduction of a legalized and regulated sports betting regime, but there are some points of differences. These concern how the rewards of sports betting should be allocated. Joseph Kelly, president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, has proposed that revenue from sports betting should go only to the casinos. New Jersey Senator Jim Whelan, chairman of the gaming committee, has made it clear that he would not get the legislative support to legalize sports betting unless the profits were spread around the state. Meanwhile all eyes are on the November 8 ballot.

Senator Lesniak is also waiting for the outcome of the sports betting referendum. He hopes that a favorable vote will help him get his revised online gambling bill passed through the Senate and the House. Lesniak has fine tuned the bill that was vetoed by the governor to accommodate most of the latter's objections.

A number of New Jersey legislators are backing an initiative to make available video slots at horseracing tracks outside Atlantic City. This is in order to make the horse racing viable at these race tracks. They also feel that a favorable vote in the sports betting referendum will help them.

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