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The Record: Poor bet

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FROM THE START of his term, Governor Christie has paid a lot of attention to Atlantic City. Upon signing legislation last February aimed at revitalizing the resort, the governor announced a laudable goal of returning "Atlantic City to the ranks of the best destinations in the world."

In September, he was at it again, labeling those who visit Las Vegas in the heat of summer as "stupid" and urging them to come to Atlantic City instead. At other times, Christie has talked about the city's non-gambling attractions, which include everything from munching on taffy on the Boardwalk to free beaches to Lucy the Elephant in nearby Margate.

There's no question that a prosperous Atlantic City is good for the state. The Christie administration is right to do all it can to attract visitors to Atlantic City. Which is why the governor should oppose legalizing online gambling in New Jersey.

Does it make sense to promote Atlantic City



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as a vacation and convention destination and then support allowing people to gamble in Atlantic City without visiting it? We don't think so.

State Sen. Raymond Lesniak, D-Union, long a proponent of expanding gambling, wants to allow state residents to play blackjack, poker and any other card games casinos offer from their computers. Besides having to be a New Jersey resident, players would have to play within state borders and, as if entering a casino itself, would need to be at least 21. Only card games would be offered, which would exclude slot machines and the roulette wheel. Customers would create online accounts with casinos.

The rules seem fine and fairly rigid as far as they go. However, in this era of technological know-how and advancement, it seems reasonable to believe that an enterprising sort — and maybe even one younger than 21 — would be able to create a program that circumvents some of the safeguards.

The possibility of getting around the rules is

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only one problem with Lesniak's idea. If Atlantic City truly has a future as a "destination resort," it has to find ways to get more people to visit. Those visitors would gamble, of course. But they also would hopefully stay a few days in city hotels, eat in city restaurants, shop in souvenir shops and maybe sample a casino show or two. That's the type of visitors the city needs, not those who win or lose money sitting at home. It's hard to see Internet gambling giving New Jersey residents greater incentive to visit Atlantic City.

Lesniak's bill to sanction Internet gambling was to be considered in the current lame-duck session, but the senator now plans to reintroduce it when the new legislative year starts on Tuesday. There is also the possibility the proposal may have to go to referendum. Whatever track it takes, it should be rejected.

A report in 2010 by Econsult Corp. of Philadelphia estimated that online gambling could produce as much as \$250 million a year in casino revenue and as much as \$55 million annually in taxes. That could be the case, but it's hard to calculate precisely in advance how much money Atlantic City businesses, and indirectly the state, would lose if gamblers have reason not to visit. Let's not try to find out.



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A large, vibrant advertisement for All American Ford.net. On the left, there is a cartoon character of a football player in a blue jersey with the number 1, holding a football. The text "PRE-SEASON SAVINGS" is in large, bold, red letters, followed by "ITS GO TIME!" in white. The central focus is "\$500 OFF" in very large, yellow, 3D-style font, with "MSRP" in white below it. Below the discount, it says "TOWARDS THE PURCHASE OF ANY NEW FORD • LINCOLN • MERCURY • SUBARU VEHICLE". At the bottom, the website "www.ALL AMERICAN FORD.NET" is written in yellow, with "MUST BE PRESENT AT TIME OF PURCHASE" in white below it. Logos for Ford, Lincoln Mercury, Subaru, and Acura are also present.

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