



## Editorial: N.J. should bet big on future of online gambling based out of Atlantic City

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By **Times of Trenton Editorial Board**

A recent ruling by the federal Justice Department has opened the gate to internet gambling, and New Jersey is jockeying for the best position.

Sen. Ray Lesniak (D-Union), one of the primary forces behind legislation to legalize and regulate online wagers, believes "the state that gets in first in this market is going to be the big winner."

A bill that may be up for a vote Monday would put New Jersey out in the lead by authorizing the state Casino Control Commission to license casinos to operate computer servers based in Atlantic City.

Computer software then would have to verify that the player is a New Jersey resident, at least 21, and playing in the state.

Only card games, such as poker, blackjack or baccarat, now offered in Atlantic City casinos would be available.

Gov. Chris Christie has vetoed similar legislation in the past; this time around, Lesniak says, provisions to keep the core operations in Atlantic City may convince the governor to support the plan.

We believe it is a good idea. There is no telling how many New Jersey residents are already wagering via the computer or portable devices. Their losses sail right out of the state's economy to offshore setups that operate in a legal gray area with little regulation.

On the other hand, an analysis from the Econsult Corp. suggests online gambling could generate \$210 million to \$250 million in gross revenue, generate nearly 1,900 jobs and raise \$46 million to \$55 million a year in tax revenue for the state.

The picture becomes even rosier if New Jersey were to take an early lead, becoming a "business hub" of the industry by exporting related services nationwide. In that case, the Econsult analysis says, the state could generate up to 57,000 jobs and \$472 million in taxes.



AP File Photo

Atlantic City casinos light up the night.

Coupled with the opportunity to help reverse Atlantic City's fortunes, the economic expectations make the internet gambling plan all the more enticing.

Now that the U.S. has removed the obstacle to online wagering, New Jersey should take advantage of the opportunity to become "the Silicon Valley of internet gaming," as Lesniak said in an Associated Press interview.

As they blaze a trail in this new direction, however, we urge lawmakers to make sure all appropriate safeguards and regulations are in place.

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