



Groups opposed to and in support of third CT casino continue efforts

*By Rob Polansky
January 24, 2017*

HARTFORD, CT (WFSB) - Pushes from groups both opposed to and for a third commercial casino in Connecticut made their arguments on Tuesday.

Groups making up a non-partisan alliance to oppose a third commercial casino are presenting their viewpoints.

The group calls itself The Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut.

It said it consists of 11 groups that span a broad range of liberal and conservative viewpoints.

Its goal is to "work to educate the public and state officials about the economic and social costs of more legalized gambling and to oppose efforts to open a commercial casino in the Hartford area."

It includes the following groups: The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, The Episcopal Church in Connecticut, The Connecticut League of Women Voters, The Family Institute of Connecticut, The New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the Connecticut Association for Human Services, The Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport, Advocacy Unlimited, Inc., The Farmington Valley American Muslim Center, The New England Conference of the United Methodist Church and The American Baptist Churches of Connecticut.

The groups said casino winnings are flat or shrinking in many states, including 40 percent in Connecticut.

It cited a 2016 student from the Nelson Rockefeller Institute of Government that warned state governments that despite short-run increases in public revenues, those revenues can quickly reverse and decline.

More information on the coalition's stance can be found on its website here.

The Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan tribes said they will continue their effort to "preserve jobs and revenue in Connecticut" by holding a community conversation at East Windsor Middle School on Tuesday night.

"We're not coming to this meeting with fancy renderings or a signed agreement," said Kevin Brown, Mohegan Tribal Council chairman. "We want to be good neighbors, and a huge part of that is engaging local residents to hear their concerns and answer their questions. It's also a chance for us to clearly outline the positive elements we want to bring to the community, like the good paying jobs with good benefits that are so in need right now. We look forward to beginning this conversation next week, and to working with communities in the weeks and months ahead."

"I think getting an understanding of the community concerns because again that's what matters the most to us making sure this is the right fit for the community," said Rodney Butler, CEO of Mashantucket Pequot.

Police unions are supporting a third casino in East Windsor.

The East Windsor Police Union, Local 3583 of Council 4 AFSCME, announced its support of construction at a site at the former Showcase Cinemas in town.

"We polled our members and they feel strongly that a casino will be positive for East Windsor," said Sgt. Jeffrey Reimer, president. "If this is approved, it will help the local economy by bringing good jobs to our community and generating revenues that will benefit our entire town."

Det. Derek Puorro, vice president of AFSCME Local 1361 representing Middletown police called the support important.

"All over Connecticut, declining revenues are taking a bite out of the economy and forcing

deep cuts to vital services like law enforcement," Puorro said. "It's rare to see a project that will reverse this negative scenario, and that's why we're supporting our brothers and sisters who protect and serve East Windsor."

At the meeting on Tuesday, critics complained about the strain the casino could put on local fire and police, along with a host of other potential problems.

However, supporters say the casino would bring employment and money.

Ultimately, state lawmakers will have the final decision. The other option being considered is a site in Windsor Locks.

Tribal leaders want to open the new casino by 2018.