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Predatory gambling opposition preps for casinos fight

Coalition looks to fight plans for expansion of gaming in the state

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ALBANY — A coalition of anti-gambling advocates is hoping to derail the next step on the road to an expansion of casino gaming in New York — an effort that pits them against Gov. [Andrew Cuomo](#) and the state Legislature as well as a multibillion-dollar industry.

The Coalition Against Gambling in New York is made up predominantly of religious organizations running the gamut from conservative to progressive, as well as those concerned about gambling addiction. All present said the government was rushing into serving as little more than an enabler for an industry that preys on the poor and desperate.

"It's the biggest something-for-nothing scheme ever invented," said [Les Bernal](#), executive director of Stop Predatory Gambling, referring to gaming corporations. "And the reason why they get away with it is because government is a partner to it."

Asked about the timing of Monday's news conference, CAGNY Chairman [Joel Rose](#) said that it was the first time the various members could convene since the initial passage of the gaming legislation in March, an event that had taken the opponents by surprise. It was accomplished as part of the flurry of bills, many of them passed after midnight, that cleared the way for the passage of the state budget a few weeks later.

The Rev. [Duane Motley](#) of New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms — perhaps the loudest voice against last year's legalization of same-sex marriage — called the gaming corporations' appeal "a brainwashing of the state legislators."

"More casinos will bring about more destruction of families," Motley said.

Several gaming companies, as well as the recently formed [New York Gaming Association](#), which represents the state's nine racetrack casinos, have begun efforts to cast the potential expansion as an economic generator for New York — including upstate areas hit hard by the recent downturn.

Motley added that the state couldn't be counted on to watchdog casino gaming when it was hoping to reap a financial windfall from its expansion. "How can they regulate something that they're depending on the revenue from?" Motley said.

The advocates planned to hold individual meetings with lawmakers in addition to its media outreach. "The gambling industry is already spending millions on this," Rose said. "We just don't have those kinds of resources."

The amendment to the state constitution requires passage through two consecutively elected legislatures — in this case, the current body and the one to be elected in November — followed by a statewide vote, which could come as early as November 2013.

The current plan is to allow up to seven new non-Indian casinos around the state, although the politically tricky question of their siting has yet to be worked out.