

Editorial: What price is Florida willing to pay to add destination resort casinos to its already plentiful gaming options?

Editorial board

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"We're going to take a full look at it," Florida Senate President [Mike Haridopolos](#) said recently.

The "it" is bringing destination resort gaming to the Sunshine State.

During the 2011 Legislature, Sen. Dennis Jones, R-Seminole, introduced — but then withdrew — a bill that would have allowed five destination resorts, with full casinos, around the state. Now, in advance of the 2012 Legislature, Haridopolos is laying the groundwork to help shepherd a similar proposal through the Senate. Toward this objective, Haridopolos told The Associated Press he changed the membership of a key Senate committee to ensure the gaming bill gets a floor vote.

Destination gaming resorts in the Sunshine State?

This is a bad bet.

It's not like state residents and visitors are wanting for gambling options. Florida already is the fourth-largest gaming state in the nation. Florida Lotto, Indian casinos, greyhound- and horse-racing tracks and offshore casino cruises are readily available. In addition, slot machine gaming is available, by legislative decree, in Broward and Miami-Dade counties.

When it comes to gaming, more is less for communities where gambling is an option.

The Washington, D.C.-based Stop Predatory Gambling Foundation (www.stoppredatorygambling.org) documents the negative effects gaming has on communities. Spend some time on the website and ask yourself: Do I want these problems in my community?

Studies show many negative effects on communities when gaming options are close at hand. These include: all sorts of social problems, increases in foreclosures and prostitution, and a loss of jobs in existing businesses and restaurants suddenly forced to compete with casinos.

Why the renewed interest in destination resort gaming? The estimated \$1 billion to \$2 billion in annual revenue it would generate for the state. But at what price?

A 2010 report by the New Hampshire Gambling Commission concluded that adding one casino (in New Hampshire) would raise \$219 million in state revenue, but the total social cost would be \$287.7 million — a net drain of \$68.7 million.

Yes, Florida needs revenue. And jobs. But let's be clear: The lion's share of the jobs created by destination resort gaming would be low-paying, service jobs.

For example, the gaming industry pays its blackjack dealers an average of \$14,525 a year, according to mysalary.com.

Doesn't Florida — look at its efforts to improve public education at all levels and to attract high-tech and bio-tech operations — want more from its economy?

This is one gamble Haridopolos and his colleagues in Tallahassee shouldn't take.