

CASINOS' CHANCES IN FLORIDA DEPENDS ON JOBS



Some high-stakes supporters are boosting a new interest that promises to increase jobs - casinos. They contend they can transform Miami into the Las Vegas of the East Coast, hoping to light a fire under the state's arrested economy. They feel the attractions Miami has to offer could allow the region to become a serious competitor in the casino market. The Genting Group is a company located in Malaysia that operates a huge casino in Singapore. This group is so positive that Miami is ready for the casino business that it has spent close to a half-billion dollars buying land in the downtown Miami area on which it plans to build a rambling 3.8 billion structure made of coral that is sure to drastically change Miami's skyline. People like Michael Ferrarelli, a part-time worker at the Miami Dolphins' stadium, think this sounds wonderful. "With the economy the way it is and so many people out of work right now, it's the best way to boost the economy," Ferrarelli said. "You're going to bring thousands of jobs into each location." The amount of money that has already been invested by Genting has attracted the attention of other casinos, particularly those who currently own other businesses in South Florida. This new economic endeavor for Miami, however, will need to be approved by the state legislature and the governor. Lobbying strategies have started in full swing by Casino backers as the controversy over gambling becomes one of top priorities for the congressional session beginning in January. It would seem logical that lawmakers would be approving of bringing casinos to Miami given Florida's 10 percent unemployment rate. However, this is not so. The original bill required each company desiring to build a casino to spend at least 2 billion dollars. This bill had the approval of construction companies and contractors as well as lobbyists for state businesses. However, other big companies are concerned about their own future and are encouraging lawmakers to renounce such efforts. They argue that such a large endeavor will be detrimental to existing businesses and do not believe the promises that casinos would draw tourists from around the country. These detractors point to the inability of the casinos in Nevada to bolster the economy there and do not feel such efforts in Florida are what are necessary to help their own economy. The president of the Florida Chamber of Commerce feels counting on casinos to support the struggling economy is a "fundamental mistake." Judging from lottery sales, residents of Florida currently spent a significant amount on gambling. The lottery managed by the state tallied up more than 4 billion dollars in revenue during the recent fiscal year with the already established Indian gaming contributing another 3 billion dollars. Even with these numbers, the amount of opposition against allowing these large casino conglomerates to be established in Florida will most likely deter passage of necessary legislation for their approval.