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Forum aims to answer casino questions

Sean Dobbin, Staff writer 3:15 a.m. EDT October 25, 2013



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How many jobs? Will small businesses be hurt? Will more people become addicted?

The League of Women Voters will host a question-and-answer forum on Monday evening so Rochester-area residents can ask the above questions — and many more — about the impact that non-Indian casinos would have in New York. The proposal to allow the legislature to authorize seven casinos in New York state is on the ballot on Nov. 5.

The forum, which will take place at Asbury First United Methodist Church on East Avenue, will feature one speaker from both sides of the issue.

Jim Bertolone, president of the Rochester AFL-CIO, will speak in favor of the amendment, while David Blankenhorn, president of the New York City-based Institute for American Values, will speak against it.

Both candidates will give opening statements, and the majority of the time will be used for audience questions, said former Rochester mayor William Johnson, who helped to organize the event.

Bertolone said his organization supported the casino amendment.

"We support it because of the jobs involved, and because as far as I can tell, there's no tax money involved," he said. "Construction jobs tend to be middle-class jobs... and they're talking about 15,000 construction jobs, which tend to have a multiplier, and 7,000 permanent jobs."

Johnson, who is Blankenhorn's colleague on the Council on Casinos, a group of 33 public policy practitioners from across the country, said the promises made by the state need to be looked at more closely.

"For some of us, the so-called economic benefits are not as certain as they would have us believe," said Johnson. "These kinds of things end up benefiting the states more than the localities."

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