



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Joseph A. Griffo

Griffo and Magee to Push Racetrack Expansion Measures

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO June 6, 2011

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Griffo and Magee to Push Measures to Expand Racetrack Operations in Upstate Counties

(Albany) – State Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R-C-IP, Rome) and Assemblyman William Magee (D-Nelson) today announced that they are sponsoring legislation that could protect and expand one of the major tourism assets of Oneida County – the Vernon Downs complex, which includes its famous harness racing track.

The proposed legislation aims to provide that any new harness horse racetrack cannot be located within 75 miles of any existing harness horse racetrack. Separate legislation that calls for amending the state Constitution to allow an existing racing facility, in specific circumstances, to operate a casino.

“I believe that tracks such as Oneida County’s Vernon Downs are important tourist attractions that deserve to be supported,” Griffo said. “The policy of our state should be to work with these private investors who have invested millions of dollars in these tracks and related enterprises so that they and the communities around them can experience a revival and growth.”

"The legislation would require that any new harness horse racetrack cannot be located

within 75 miles of an existing harness horse racetrack. This legislation will prevent oversaturation of the harness horse racetrack industry within a small geographic area of the state which would have a devastating overall effect on neighboring facilities as well as the state and local economies," Magee said.

Griffo and Magee would also present legislation that would allow for casino gaming at facilities that accept para-mutual wagering, host live horse racing, are in a county of under 500,000 in population and are not in regions covered by applicable Native American compacts. The bill would have a home rule requirement, which mandates a county-wide referendum, ensuring local control of any decision.

Griffo said revenue generated could help a region's economy, and help both state and local governments. He also noted that revenue would fund treatment of persons addicted to gambling.

Griffo said the legislation would provide for up to five privately owned and operated casinos: one in the in the counties of Saratoga, Oneida, Tioga and two in the county of Sullivan.

"Our goal in this legislation is to create jobs and otherwise stimulate the state and local economy by the expansion of gaming, which has not occurred as a result of the failure to act upon legislation passed in October 2001 and conferred the authority for Native American tribes to operate up to three casinos in Sullivan and Ulster counties. None are in operation or even under construction," Griffo said. "Due to this inaction, the time has come for the legislature to authorize the construction and operation of casinos by other-than-tribal entrepreneurs. Such action requires an amendment to the state constitution which prohibits gambling of any kind unless specifically permitted by that document."

As a proposed constitutional amendment, the bill must pass the Legislature twice and be approved by New York's voters.