

Gov. Cuomo's proposal to merge Racing, Lottery picks up support

By PAUL POST

The Saratogian
ppost@saratogian.com

SARATOGA SPRINGS — The head of the Assembly's racing committee says he supports merging the Division of Lottery with the state Racing and Wagering Board.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed the move in his 2012-13 budget proposal, saying the state needs one body to deal with all gaming-related issues.

"I don't think it's a bad idea," Assemblyman Gary Pretlow, D-Yonkers, said Tuesday. "The Racing and Wagering board and Lottery are two totally different things. Lottery is a marketing division. They sell Lottery tickets and get a percentage of the revenue. The racing board is a regulatory agency that makes sure laws passed by the Legislature are followed.

"There's no overlap in their operations, so why not merge them?"

Both entities are currently located in the same building in downtown Schenectady. Cuomo has proposed creating a new five-member New York State Gaming Commission to replace Lottery and the Racing and Wagering Board.

Pretlow said he envisions a new agency having three separate divisions — Lottery, racing and casino gambling.

He said he believes the state will adopt a constitutional amendment allowing for Las Vegas-style table games in the next couple of years.

The assemblyman said he doesn't believe racing will take a back seat to casino gambling, which has the potential to generate considerably more revenue for the state than racing.

"Not if I have anything to say about it," he said. "But I'm not the governor."

Cuomo is touting plans for the country's largest convention center at Aqueduct Race Track in Queens, where a new casino with 5,000 video gaming machines opened last fall.

The casino operator, Genting Group, now wants to build a major convention center there, raising concerns that Aqueduct's race track might be sacrificed to make room for the massive new facility.

“It shouldn’t be done at the expense of racing,” Pretlow said. “I can’t see eliminating winter racing.”

In another matter, Pretlow said there has been no movement yet on efforts to open betting shops in New York since the closure of New York City Off Track Betting Corp. in December 2010.

Pretlow has co-sponsored legislation that would allow Catskill Regional OTB to expand into the New York market. New York Racing Association is also eyeing the territory.

Pretlow said he believes either entity would be an improvement over the current situation, since New York City OTB shut down 13 months ago. The OTB handled an estimated \$750 million in wagers in 2010, its last year of operations.

“The bookies are tapping into it,” Pretlow said. “NYRA or Catskill OTB would be better than what we have now.”