

N.Y. Legislation Would Halt OTB Casino Plans

By Tom Precious

Courtesy BloodHorse.com

A New York lawmaker, sharply critical of the Nassau Off-Track Betting Corp. bid to try to locate a casino at **Belmont Park** racetrack, has introduced a measure banning casinos by either of the two Long Island-based OTBs.

Assemblyman Gary Pretlow, chairman of the Assembly racing and wagering committee, wants to revoke a 2013 law that permitted Nassau and Suffolk to each open casinos with up to 1,000 video lottery terminals apiece.

The legislation is significant because Pretlow was the sponsor of the 2013 bill in the Assembly that, among its provisions, authorized the Long Island OTB casino facilities.

The two OTB corporations have had trouble finding locations for the two facilities, running into considerable community opposition across Long Island. In December, Nassau OTB floated a plan to locate its one VLT casino at Belmont, which drew sharp criticism from some lawmakers, notably Pretlow, who said the Legislature never envisioned casinos at both Aqueduct, home to the existing Resorts World, and Belmont. Pretlow believes a VLT casino at Belmont would be too close to the existing casino at Aqueduct.

In a bill memo explaining the intent of the new legislation, Pretlow noted a decline in gambling sales as more competition comes into play across the Northeast.

"The addition of video lottery gaming at OTB sites in Suffolk and Nassau counties is an unnecessary expansion of gambling, and will have negative fiscal and social effects on these communities, rather than a risk-free source of revenue," the memo states.

"The lure of easy money from 2,000 video lottery gaming terminals in Suffolk and Nassau counties will permanently alter the character of Long Island communities, and expanded gambling-related social problems that will far outweigh expected revenues," it adds.

The Pretlow bill was introduced Feb. 3. Though it does not yet have a Senate sponsor, the introduction of the bill by the committee that oversees racing and wagering matters at least, for

now, sends a signal of growing problems at the Capitol over the future of the Long Island VLT casino push.

The VLT casino expansion for Nassau and Suffolk was approved in 2013 as part of the state's broader commercial casino growth, which was approved by lawmakers and then by voters statewide in a referendum. Unlike the authority for up to seven new full-blown casinos, which are allowed to have real slot machines and table games like poker, the Long Island OTBs are limited to VLTs, which are slot-like devices connected to the state's lottery agency.