

Legal Gambling Sought for City

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A statewide effort to legalize gambling in Atlantic City — led by a nucleus of prominent business and political leaders from the resort area — has been underway for more than a month, it was learned Friday.

Known to be heading the group are Meyer I. (Mike) Segal, former president of the Ventnor City Council, Arnold Orsatti, restaurateur and editor-publisher of an Italian-American newspaper, and Maxwell (Sonny) Goldberg, co-owner of Howard Johnson's Hotel in Atlantic City.

Some members of the group have already held at least one meeting, which was attended by county political leaders and officials from several municipalities.

"We received a tremendous reception from everyone concerned," said Segal, who declined to say what officials were present.

He added, however, that many of those who attended the first meeting would participate in later public meetings.

SUPPORT EXPECTED

At the same time, the Atlantic City Hotel - Motel Restaurant Association, as well as the New Jersey Hotel - Motel Association will study the project and are expected to stand squarely behind it, a spokesman said Friday.

Meanwhile, John Siracusa Jr., president of the Greater Atlantic City Chamber of Commerce, said late Friday that the "subject of legalized gambling will definitely be put on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting."

Segal, a business executive, said that legal steps necessary to bring municipally-controlled gambling to Atlantic City had been discussed with the state Attorney General's office.

Since the state constitution

(Continued on Page 14)

Legalized Gambling Effort Underway

(Continued from Page 1)

prohibits gambling, the legislature would have to approve a bill setting up a statewide referendum on the question.

FINAL ACTION

If approved by a majority of the state's voters, the issue could then be taken for final action to the Atlantic City Commission.

A spokesman for the attorney general's office said that the voters in a county usually have to approve such a measure, but added that the enabling legislation could be written so as to leave final authority in the hands of the City Commission.

Segal, Orsatti, and Goldberg stressed Friday that the effect of legalized gambling would be sharply to reduce property taxation and "to revitalize the city as one of the world's top resort centers."

"It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see just how beneficial the effect would be," Segal said. "Look at Las Vegas. Look at the Riviera. There's no reason why Atlantic City, so close to the other great metropolitan areas of the country, couldn't be another resort like one of these."

"And this doesn't even take into account all of the conventions and trade shows we've been losing to resorts which offer legalized gambling as an added inducement," Goldberg noted.

"All the islands such as Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, Nassau, are taking many of the good customers, that used to come to Atlantic City," Goldberg added.

In addition, Segal said that "revenues derived could bolster our school financial situation and not only bring better teachers to the area but would also help build much-needed facilities."

Legalized gambling has been a topic of discussion in Atlantic City for years. The last

concerted effort was headed by Mrs. Thomas Fox, who was chairman of the Women's Division of the Chamber of Commerce.

Mrs. Fox and her associates estimated that the annual proceeds from legalized pari-mutual dog racing and jai-alai alone would amount to approximately \$25 million.

She had recommended a "Non-Partisan Control Commission" to control legalized gambling and issue licenses.

In addition, she urged that all tax proceeds from gaming be turned over to the city for the construction of public utilities and other improvements.

The effects of legalized gambling in the state are currently under study by the new State Council Against Crime.

The council was appointed earlier this year by Gov. Richard J. Hughes, and is headed by U. S. Asst. Atty. Gen. William Tompkins of Essex County.

The committee is supposed to determine if legalized gambling would deprive the underworld of its chief source of revenue.