

Jacob Epstein
Kean Assembly Speaker
jacob.epstein@comcast.net

Issue: New Jersey has faced controversy for having some of the most lenient laws regarding gambling.

Necessary Background: Gambling has been legal in NJ since 1976, when casinos were first constructed in Atlantic City. Online gambling became legal within NJ's borders in 2013, making NJ the largest of the 3 states that have legalized this practice [1]. In 2012, NJ attempted to legalize sports betting, but was blocked from passing this legislation, as it violated a 1992 federal law that prevents states other than Nevada from legalizing sports betting. In response, Christie has announced his intention to appeal this decision to the U.S. Supreme court [2].

Evidence: In 2014, Atlantic City's 8 remaining casinos made a combined revenue of \$2.62 billion dollars, about 0.4% of NJ's GDP [3]. Additionally, the casinos contribute greatly to tourism revenue in Cape May County, and online gambling and the state lottery generate \$2.9 billion and \$18 million, thus demonstrating gambling's large impact on New Jersey's economy [4]. As a result of these lax regulations, New Jerseyans have constant access to gambling. Accordingly, 5 percent of NJ gamblers are addicted to gambling, compared to a national average of around 2 to 3 percent [5]. As such, New Jersey's economy is becoming increasingly reliant on a practice that negatively affects a significant portion of players.

Impact: While NJ's lenient gambling laws have expanded a practice which clearly has a positive impact on New Jersey's economy, these laws have also raised rates of gambling addiction far above the national average. Accordingly, these contrasting effects have framed a debate about whether the economic benefit is worth the detriment lenient laws pose to individuals with gambling problems. Furthermore, critics worry that if NJ secures the right to legalize sports betting, current problems with gambling addiction will be compounded, as gambling addicts would have more opportunities to lose control.

Possible Solutions: In order to be effective, legislation about gambling must balance the economic needs of the state with the welfare of gamblers. As such, bills that restrict gambling must propose a solution to make up for lost revenue, and bills that expand gambling must pay attention to the well-being of those who gamble. Potential approaches to these concerns could be to tax gambling earnings and using some of this money to fund gambling addiction therapy programs, or incrementally placing restrictions on gambling over an extended period of time while promoting tourism in the area to compensate for lost revenue.

Sources:

1. <http://www.gamblingonline.com/laws/new-jersey/>

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3. <https://www.playnj.com/atlantic-city/revenue/>
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