

11. The Game's Afoot

The Ohio Secretary of State certified petition signatures that put a proposal to allow casino gambling in Ohio's four largest cities on the ballot. Recently, Ohio Governor Ted Strickland issued an Executive Order authorizing the Ohio lottery to run slot machines at horse racing tracks, even after Ohioans had voted against them.

State sanctioned gambling has been around since 1964, when New Hampshire started the first lottery. A total of 27 states now have casinos, and only two states have no legalized gambling. Legalized gambling yielded \$70 billion in 2004, an amount that exceeded what Americans spent on all other forms of entertainment combined.

Since approving the Ohio lottery in 1974, Ohio voters have rejected subsequent state-sponsored gambling schemes. Like Ohio, other states that have refused casinos in the past are now reconsidering the issue. Despite the current distressed economic times, anti-gambling forces, including the conservative Ohio Roundtable and some church leaders, believe the issue will fail in November. Some anti-gambling activists maintain that gambling is inherently wrong. Others point to difficult issues such as gambling addiction, unfair taxation methods, unrealistic revenue estimates, expanded organized crime, vulnerability of the poor, increased poverty, threats to family stability, and religious objections. Advocates endorse both the slots and casinos as much-needed help for Ohio's ailing economy. They also oppose government interference in the rights of citizens to enjoy leisure and spend their money as they wish. Other observers see a middle ground that supports legal gambling for mature adults, but adds more controls such as limits on casino size, operating hours, and location. Opponents and those on middle ground all want just enough state intervention to assure the rights of individuals to do what they want as long as nobody else is hurt.