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Pataki Proposes the Creation of a State Gambling Commission

By **MARC SANTORA**

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ALBANY, May 27 - Gov. George E. Pataki introduced a plan on Thursday that would overhaul the way gambling operations in New York are monitored, through the creation of a powerful new state commission.

The commission, which would be made up of members appointed by the governor, would have broad authority and oversight over all state-sanctioned gambling activities, including the lottery, horse racing, Indian casinos and new video lottery terminals. Currently, separate entities oversee each of the activities.

"By centralizing all of the state's regulatory functions under one agency and providing stronger oversight, we will eliminate redundant functions, remove obsolete entities and instill a higher degree of accountability that will promote public confidence in the racing and gaming industry," Mr. Pataki said in a statement.

Although Republicans and Democrats alike have publicly expressed moral qualms over state-sponsored gambling, the enterprise continues to grow. On Wednesday, Mr. Pataki announced that he would use the money generated from new video lottery terminals, which are essentially slot machines, to meet a court order that the state increase aid to so-called high-need schools.

Mr. Pataki said his proposal to overhaul gambling oversight also had language that would help ease the spread of the lottery terminals to places like Aqueduct. The Pataki administration hopes to generate roughly \$2 billion over the next five years through the machines.

But as the state's reliance on gambling revenue has grown, there have also been several high-profile cases of corruption in the gambling industry in recent years, most notably

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involving the New York Racing Association.

The association operates New York's top three thoroughbred tracks - Aqueduct, Belmont and Saratoga - under a state franchise. Federal prosecutors have alleged that top officials in NYRA have engaged in tax evasion, conspiracy and fraud.

Mr. Pataki's plan calls for the creation of a new oversight board to "oversee and monitor the finances of NYRA and make recommendations to the governor and the Legislature on the future of the racing franchise."

Currently, the association has three and a half years left on its franchise, which it would like to extend beyond that time.

But there is a fierce lobbying war being waged for control over horse racing in the state, with Magna Entertainment Corporation battling NYRA.

The State Senate majority leader, Joseph L. Bruno, a Republican from Rensselaer County, said he supported Mr. Pataki's proposal. "Over the past year, there has been a growing consensus that greater oversight will be needed as gaming and casino operations expand," Mr. Bruno said in a statement.

For Mr. Pataki's plan to take effect, he will need the support of the Assembly speaker, Sheldon Silver, a Democrat from Manhattan. Mr. Silver had no comment on the plan, his aides said.



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