

Voters to tackle sports betting

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MAYS LANDING – Voters statewide will have an opportunity to place a mark on sports betting in New Jersey when they hit the polls Nov. 8.

Public Question 1 on the ballot asks if New Jersey residents want to legalize sports betting. The question asked if gambling on sports should be legalized at casinos in Atlantic City in addition to racetracks and former racetrack sites throughout the state. Even if the voters approve the referendum, sports betting would only be allowed if a law were passed and a federal ban was changed.

According to the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act of 1992, only four states are permitted to allow sports wagering: Delaware, Montana, Nevada and Oregon. However Nevada is the only state taking legal bets on individual games and Delaware only permits multi-game or parlay bets on professional football.

However, the federal ban on sports betting is only one play in a series that will decide the game in the Garden State.

The ballot question would grant a constitutional amendment that would make that law possible. A yes vote on Tuesday's ballot question would allow state lawmakers to legalize wagering on sports only when permitted by federal law. Then, state legislature would also have to pass a law to allow sports betting when federal law allows it.

The interpretive statement of the question says bets could only be placed on professional, college or amateur sports, or athletic events that do not take place in the state or in which a New Jersey college team is not playing.

According to the most recent poll, voters who are aware of the question are in favor of it.

Fifty-two percent of voters say they are in favor of sports betting according to a Fairleigh Dickinson University PublicMind poll released Oct. 10. Thirty-one percent say they oppose it.

The same poll showed that 67 percent say they have little interest in the issue and 71 percent say they have heard little or nothing about it.

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey gives reasons both for and against voting in favor of the measure on the ballot.

The league reports if the amendment is approved, federal courts may allow a challenge to the federal law to go forward and that state regulation would reduce crime in an already widespread sports betting industry.

The league cites tax revenues between \$30.6 million and \$220.7 million garnered by the state through the measure.

Among the arguments against provided by the league are that expansions historically see an increase of gamblers and between 2 and 5 percent of those become problem gamblers. According to the league, those problem gamblers are estimated at 300,000-500,000.

Also, the league questions the clarity of "former racetracks" citing that most county fairground were sites of horse racing in the past.

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