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Puerto Rico Officials Pursue Legalized Sports Betting to Spur Tourism

April 3, 2019 BY [STEVE BITTENBENDER](#)

Puerto Rico officials announced earlier this week that they will pursue legalized sports betting in an attempt to promote the Caribbean island as a tourist destination.



Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rossello spent Wednesday in Sevilla, Spain at a global tourism conference. Earlier this week, he announced his support for legalizing sports betting, which he believes will help the island's tourism economy, which is still recovering from Hurricane Maria. (Image: twitter.com/ricardorossello)

The plan has the support of Gov. Ricardo Rossello, who unveiled the legislation on Monday. Not only would the bill regulate sports betting, but it would also cover fantasy sports and esports as well. Esports includes multiplayer video games played by professionals, either individually or in teams.

“Our administration is committed to new and creative ways to improve the lives of all Puerto Ricans, especially



According to the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, a government agency, more than 1.6 million non-resident guests stayed overnight on the island in 2017. However, the [numbers dropped sharply after Maria made landfall](#) that September. Last year, only 1.3 million non-residents stayed overnight.

The hotel stays only account for a portion of the tourists as the island remains a popular destination for [cruise ships](#). The Tourism Company expects 1.7 million passengers to visit the island this year.



Backed by Businesses, too

This year's Supreme Court ruling overturning the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act also opened the door for Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory, to add sports betting to its legal gambling offerings. The Commonwealth already allows such gaming as casinos and horse racing across the island.

Because of the landmark decision, two independent research groups conducted studies on the economic impact sports betting would have on Puerto Rico.

The Innovation Group prepared the first, commissioned by the Chamber of Commerce of Puerto Rico. According to Rossello's statement, the study indicated sports betting at casinos, racetracks, and online, would generate \$29 million in [government revenues](#) in 2020 and up to \$87 million by 2024.

Kenneth Rivera, the Chamber of Commerce's president, told *Casino.org* on Wednesday that those estimates did not include indirect spending, such as hotel stays, meals at restaurants, and other tourist excursions.

The Chamber endorses sports betting, he said.

“It should be adopted in a sensible manner without unnecessary regulation,” Rivera said. “Where taxation is being imposed on a reasonable and competitive amount, and where responsible gaming is promoted.”

After the Chamber study, the government hired Spectrum Gaming Group for another report. Spectrum's market research projected retail and online sportsbooks could generate up to \$62 million annually.

Attempts to get copies of the reports were unsuccessful.

Currently, Puerto Rico levies a tax on slot machines in the territory's casinos to help fund the Tourism Company. However, according to the Foundation for Puerto Rico, tax revenue has seen a gradual decline in recent years. In 2012-13, the tax generated \$58.8 million. By 2016-17, that total slipped to slightly less than \$54 million.

Bill Would Create New Agency



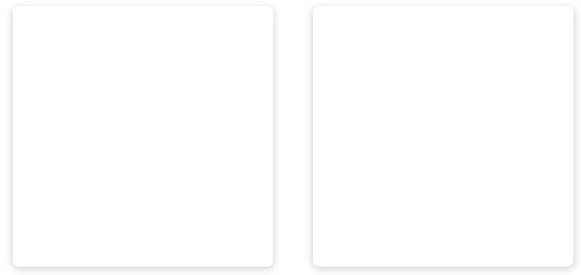
all issues related to gambling on sporting events, games of chance, and horse racing.

Currently, the government's tourism office and horse racing board manage gaming activity.

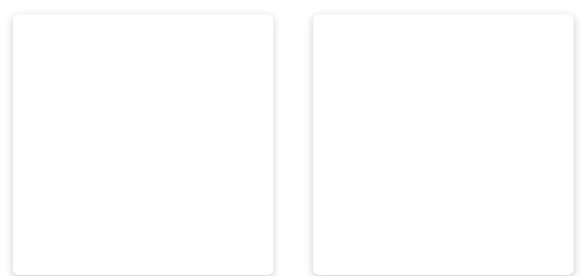
Vega's bill also calls for safeguards to mitigate gambling addiction, money laundering, and minors betting.



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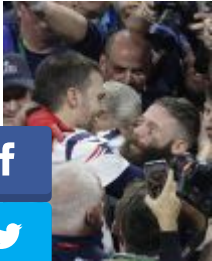


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