



The Republican.

Casino plans touted in region

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CHICOPEE - Casinos, job creation, economic collaborations and manufacturing were among the topics touched on by Lt. Gov. Timothy P. Murray during his keynote speech at Chicopee Chamber of Commerce's annual legislative luncheon yesterday.

Murray spoke about Gov. Deval L. Patrick's pledge to create 100,000 jobs and the need to create more revenue for the state. Those points led to a discussion of casinos. Patrick plans to send a 40- to 50-page bill to the Legislature within the next two weeks outlining his proposal to site three resort casinos in Massachusetts, Murray said.

"We need to provide revenue to meet the needs that the state has," Murray told his audience.

About 200 people attended the "CheckPoint 2007" luncheon at Castle of Knights on Memorial Drive. During the question and answer period, Greenfield Mayor Christine Forgey asked Murray to talk about the negative effects casinos can have on a community and whether he had information that supports Patrick's claims that casinos would generate 20,000 to 25,000 permanent jobs and create 20,000 to 30,000 construction jobs. The governor has said the state will capture \$400 million to \$500 million in annual revenues.

"We're losing over \$1 billion a year to Connecticut and Rhode Island," Murray said.

He said the governor's plan includes money to address addiction problems and sets aside money for road and bridge projects, and protects the state lottery.

"We tried to do our due diligence. We looked at best practices," Murray said. "We know people have concerns about it. We're going to put forward a plan in the next couple of weeks."

Murray talked about the importance of working together at all levels, including federal, state and local, and the importance of the governor's office having a presence in Western Massachusetts.

The governor and Murray visited Springfield on Wednesday to announce funding initiatives for that city. They also announced the governor will soon open a satellite office in Springfield.

Before Murray's talk, Chicopee Mayor Michael D. Bissonnette spoke about the need to develop new areas of the city and redevelop the old mill areas as a way to increase the city's tax base and create more jobs.

Before introducing the lieutenant governor, state Rep. Joseph F. Wagner, D-Chicopee, spoke about the importance of supporting businesses because they drive the economy.

Following the luncheon, Murray toured the new \$93.5 million Chicopee Comprehensive High School and met with local manufacturing representatives. During his luncheon talk, Murray said, "Certainly in Western Massachusetts, manufacturing is critically important. Manufacturing is still third or fourth in terms of largest employer."

Jeffrey G. Shiners, president and owner of Pioneer Packaging Inc., which employs 75 workers, said the roundtable discussion with Murray was "excellent."

"He's really down to earth. He's very much concerned about Western Massachusetts," Shiners said.

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