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Gambling opponents present their case

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ALBANY NOTEBOOK

A new state-wide coalition opposed to gambling made its debut Monday at the Capitol, bringing renowned anti-gambling expert John Warren Kindt, a professor of business and legal policy at the University of Illinois.

The Coalition Against Gambling in New York also presented activists from around the state, legislators from Western New York and several people who said their lives had been destroyed as a result of an addiction to gambling.

The group argued gambling is harmful economically - since it creates no new wealth and actually costs government money to take care of the ills it creates - and socially, since it leads to addiction, broken families, bankruptcies and crime.

Gov. George Pataki has been pushing for the authority to approve up to five Indian-run casinos in the Catskills, rather than the three now permitted under state law.

"Pataki," declared Assemblyman William Parment, D-Jamestown, "has made the choice that the necessary costs of government should be paid for by human failure and human weakness."

Pataki has said New Yorkers are gambling anyway at casinos in New Jersey and Connecticut and that New York should get some of the take.

Battle of the Titans

Ray Halbritter, the federally recognized representative of the Oneida Indian Nation, was on hand for Pataki's State of the State speech last week.

Halbritter is behind an ad campaign opposing Pataki's effort to settle the Oneidas' Central New York land claim by allowing the Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin to open one of the Catskill casinos. The Oneidas of New York run Turning Stone Resort and Casino.

After the speech, Halbritter ran into the governor outside the Assembly chamber.

According to an account in the Times-Union of Albany, Pataki reached out to shake Halbritter's hand and said he hoped the two would have better relations this year.

"I wish you'd return my phone calls," Halbritter replied.

Halbritter was escorted around the Capitol by the Oneida Nation's lobbyist, Patricia Lynch, who is one of Albany's most powerful lobbyists and former top aide to Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, D-Manhattan.

Show of support

About four dozen friends, family members, neighbors and supporters took a bus to the Capitol on Monday to see Sen. David Valesky, D-Oneida, in his first day of action at a working Senate

session.

The supporters had to leave before session actually began. But the delay resulted from Valesky and his fellow Democrats winning agreement from Republicans to work on a joint legislative reform package rather than face a fight from the Democrats over a GOP plan that had come under attack.

Tuesday, Valesky lunched with Pataki and other new members of the Legislature in the governor's second-floor Capitol office suite.

Back as lobbyists

After waiting the required two years before being able to lobby his old colleagues, former Assemblyman Harold Brown Jr., R-Camillus, was back at the Capitol for Pataki's State of the State speech.

Brown, who retired at the end of 2002, and former Assemblyman William Sanford, R-Salina, run a political lobbying and consulting business.

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