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Mob influence

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Friday, July 23, 2004

New Jersey has had an overarching fear since it allowed casino gambling 27 years ago - that organized crime would get a toehold in Atlantic City.

Now, the state Casino Control Commission has taken an alarming step toward making that fear a reality. It has approved licenses for a pair of mob-tainted construction companies from Clifton.

The commission's 5-0 vote entitles the Interstate Industrial Corporation and Interstate Drywall Corporation, both owned by brothers Frank and Peter DiTommaso, to do extensive work for Atlantic City casinos. The approval came over the vociferous objections of the state Division of Gaming Enforcement, which argued that the DiTommasos had a history of doing business with companies associated with the Gambino crime family.

The gaming division, part of the Attorney General's Office, never alleged that the DiTommasos or their companies were involved in organized crime. But as Assistant Attorney General Gary A. Ehrlich said at Wednesday's commission hearing, New Jersey casino regulators have a history of denying licenses to companies with prolonged, high-level contacts with mob figures, or when there is even an appearance of mob influence.

As Mr. Ehrlich said, the commission's decision threatens to undermine public confidence in the state's gambling industry. The gaming division plans to appeal this bad ruling, as it should.

Commissioners defend the decision as fair, saying the company's contacts with organized crime were unavoidable, considering how deeply involved the mob is in New York-area construction.

Nonsense.

A New York State government agency, New York City's own procurement officer, and the city's commission on business integrity have all found Interstate unsuitable because of its history of organized-crime contacts. The irony is that the Business Integrity Commission based its decision at least in part on evidence uncovered by New Jersey gaming investigators.

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OPINION

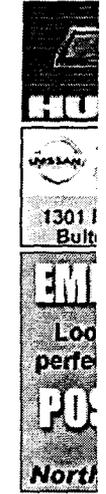
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