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## More than half of lawmakers get \$600 each from DelPark

By *GINGER GIBSON*  
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The state's three casinos last year proved their prowess as a lobbying force in the Legislature, when they beat back proposals to increase the number of casinos and allow sports betting at new locations.

While the General Assembly debated those issues, gaming interests gave thousands of dollars to legislators, usually the maximum amount allowed by law.

Those who want to expand the number of casinos in the state have pointed to the influence of the three casinos as the primary foil to their initiatives. State law allows gambling only at the three existing racinos, but a pending proposal would allow a new casino in Sussex County and one in Wilmington.

Over the course of last year, more than half of the General Assembly received \$600 contributions, the maximum allowed by law, from the Delaware Racing Association, Delaware Park's political action committee.

Of the 52 legislators who had filed reports by Friday, 32 had received gifts from the racetrack. Two others had not yet filed but said they also received money from Delaware Park. The total bill for the casino's political arm topped \$20,000.

In the month before a vote May 7 on sports betting and a tax hike for casinos, 16 of the 37 House members who filed campaign-finance reports received checks from Delaware Park for the maximum contribution allowed by law, according to those reports filed last week. Seven others had received checks earlier in 2009, and six got them after the vote.

The five senators who got money from Delaware Park received it after the vote.

William Fasy, chief operating officer at Delaware Park, said the casino donates the maximum to any lawmaker who will accept it as frequently as the law allows. Those gifts have nothing to do with pending legislation, he said.

"We donate to campaigns because we understand the difficult jobs legislators face and believe it is the right thing to do," Fasy said. "We don't expect anything in return."

No lawmaker reported contributions from the other two casinos, Dover Downs or Harrington Raceway and Casino.

Fasy said it was a coincidence that a dozen House members received donations in March and April. He said checks were cut then because the casino had held group fundraisers or because they audited their books at that time and determined those lawmakers had not yet received donations.

Mark A. Smith, political science professor at the University of Washington in Seattle, said he was surprised by racetrack officials' statements that they expected nothing in exchange for their donations.

"They do hope that it starts the conversation, expands their contacts and gives them access," Smith said. "Campaign contributions are often a lobbying strategy, especially for businesses."

On top of the donations from Delaware Park, 21 of the 52 lawmakers who filed campaign-finance reports last week also received money from the Standardbred Owners Association, a group of racehorse owners whose industry benefits directly from changes to gaming laws, including the size of the purses for horse races. The group opposes the creation of new gambling venues. The donations totaled \$4,825 last year, most doled out in \$100 and \$200 installments, but some were as large as \$600.

Several lawmakers also reported individual contributions from lobbyists who are registered with the Public Integrity Commission as representatives of gambling interests, including Mary Davis, Patrick Allen, Robert Byrd and his daughter Rebecca Byrd, who are collectively a lobbying powerhouse with longtime ties in Legislative Hall.

Delaware, unlike the federal government, does not require campaign donors to disclose their employers, making it difficult to determine who else with gambling ties contributed money to individual legislators.

Lawmakers said campaign donations have no correlation with how they vote on legislation, especially on such important issues as sports betting or table games.

"I get a check from them every year," House Minority Leader Richard Cathcart, R-Middletown, said of the Delaware Park contribution. "I don't think there is any connection with the vote." Cathcart brokered the deal that got sports betting enacted and, with support of the casinos, legalized table games. He has opposed proposals to authorize new casinos.

Sen. Karen Peterson, D-Stanton, didn't receive a donation from Delaware Park and said she couldn't speak to the motives behind any checks her fellow lawmakers received, but said she often returns checks to donors. Peterson has said she favors expanding gambling to new locations.

"There are just some things I'm not comfortable with," Peterson said. "Sometimes you get checks, and you know the person has something coming up."

House Majority Leader Pete Schwartzkopf, D-Rehoboth Beach, blamed friendly ties between lobbyists and lawmakers when he recently criticized members of the Video and Sports Lottery Commission for voting in opposition to a study that recommended adding two new casinos.

Schwartzkopf supports proposals to expand the number of casinos in Delaware.

The report concluded that additional venues, while siphoning some business from the existing three casinos, could create 5,000 new jobs and more than \$200 million in additional money for the state.

Samuel Hoff, political science professor at Delaware State University, said casinos hired "superstar" lobbyists, including the Byrd Group, led by the former lawmaker and Gov. Ruth Ann Minner appointee Robert Byrd, and Ned Davis Associates, which is run by the founder's daughter Mary Davis.

"They have the ear of the state Legislature, if not the actual influence," Hoff said.

## Additional Facts

### WHO RECEIVED DONATIONS

#### House Donation from Delaware Park

Mike Ramone \$300 on 7/10/09

Robert Walls \$503.28 on 4/2/09

Tom Kovach \$600 on 1/5/09

Ruth Briggs King \$600 on 10/20/09

Deborah Hudson \$600 on 10/25

Daniel Short \$600 on 10/29/09

Dennis E. Williams \$600 on 12/21/09

Richard Cathcart \$600 on 2/2/09

Greg Lavelle \$600 on 3/09

Gerald Hocker \$600 on 3/23/09

Nick Manolakos \$600 on 3/23/09

Michael Mulrooney \$600 on 3/23/09

William "Bobby" Outten \$600 on 3/23/09

William Carson \$600 on 4/2/09

John Atkins \$600 on 4/20/09

Earl Jacques \$600 on 4/20/09

John Kowalko \$600 on 4/20/09

Melanie George Marshall \$600 on 4/20/09

Teresa Schooley \$600 on 4/20/09

John Viola \$600 on 4/20/09

Pete Schwartzkopf \$600 on 4/28/09

Bradford Bennett \$600 on 4/3/09

Joe Miro \$600 on 4/7/09

Hazel Plant \$600 on 5/1/09

Darryl Scott \$600 on 5/12/09

Quinton Johnson \$600 on 5/5/09

Michael Barbieri \$600 on 6/26/09

Bryon Short \$600 on 9/11/09

Clifford "Biff" Lee \$600 on 9/9/09

**Senate**

Brian Bushweller \$600 on 3/30/09

Joe Booth \$600 on 4/27/09

Michael Katz \$600 on 5/4/09

Colin Bonini \$600 on 5/8/09

Bruce Ennis \$600 on 6/2/09

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