

# Wagers Not Weed For New York?

There are two ongoing issues happening within the state of New York that are dividing citizens right down the middle – and probably always will do. Those are the campaign to legalize marijuana within the state, and the campaign to legalize sports betting within the state. In both cases, proponents of legalization say that New York State is already missing out on hundreds of millions of dollars in tax revenue, and the tax revenue could be used to pay for vital public services. Opponents of both initiatives say that they're illicit, immoral, and will do more harm than good. At this point, both sides of the debate are firmly entrenched in their views. There's little prospect of either side changing their minds.

If we had to put a bet (and ask you to excuse us for the pun) on which of the activities will become legal in the next twelve months, we'd say that New York State citizens can probably look forward (or not look forward, as the case might be) to the legalization of marijuana by the end of 2020. It's no secret that Gov. Andrew Cuomo [is a huge proponent](#) of changing the law where it relates to cannabis and said at the start of the year that he'd push as hard as he had to push in order to make it happen. He almost managed to drive a change in the law through last year but fell at the last hurdle. He's far more likely to get his wish this time around – but is this the right focus? Should the state be looking harder at sports betting instead?

We have a very good reason for asking this. According to the most recent figures available, New Yorkers spent [more than eight hundred million dollars](#) betting on sports in New Jersey last year. That's a little less than a quarter of all of New Jersey's total sports betting revenue of \$4.6bn in 2019. New Jersey is enjoying a huge tax windfall from that massive amount of spending. New York is getting nothing at all. The best part of a billion dollars is flowing out of New York to

New Jersey. That's a bad deal, and it's a bad deal that will carry on happening unless someone changes the law to prevent it. We can't ban New Yorkers from making legal bets in New Jersey, and so the only thing that can be done to level the playing field is allowing them to make those bets here.

The most exciting thing about the eight hundred million dollar figure – from a tax and revenue point of view – is that it's only the tip of the iceberg. That's only the money that's being spent by people who are willing to go to the trouble of going to New Jersey to place their bets. How much larger would that figure be if people didn't have to do that? How many more people would be placing bets? How many people who've never place a single bet in New Jersey would decide to take advantage of their new freedom and place a wager on the fortunes of the Knicks, or the Mets, or anybody else who takes their fancy? Could that figure be doubled? Tripled? Quadrupled, or even higher? Wouldn't it be fun to find out? Gov. Cuomo certainly ought to think so, which makes us wonder why he seems to be so keen to back what might turn out to be the wrong horse.

The idea of legalizing sports betting has certainly occurred to at least some state lawmakers and politicians. Sen. Joe Addabbo of Queens has noted the amount of New York money disappearing into New Jersey and has also noted the fact that the state is dealing with a not-inconsiderable budget deficit. In his mind, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize how one of those situations could be altered to benefit the other. That's why he – and some of his like-minded colleagues, aren't just pushing for sports betting to be legalized in New York. He'd like to see New York go a step further and allow sports betting to be carried out remotely using mobile phones.

Even for the majority of the states that have so far legalized sports betting, this would be a step beyond the current limits. In most places, to place a bet on a sport, you have to visit an approved location and place your bets in person.

Gambling of any kind using mobile phones or the internet is frowned upon, and only the most liberalized states allow people to do so. The idea of mobile betting tends to provoke hand-wringing from people who worry about addiction issues, or believe that allowing everyone the ability to place bets from the comfort of their own homes will destroy the moral fabric of New York. Research from elsewhere shows us that this isn't the case.

The United Kingdom – one of the most relaxed countries in the world when it comes to sports betting – has allowed mobile betting for years. Mobile sports betting is just a logical progression from mobile slots, which are popular in the country. When old-fashioned slot machines went online in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, they became online slots. There are now dozens of online slots websites operating within the United Kingdom, and some of them have diversified. One by one, the better online slots websites like [UKOnlineSlots](#) are also offering mobile slots, and sports bookmakers have followed suit by introducing their own apps and dedicated mobile betting sites. Brits can bet on almost anything they like through their phones, and rates of gambling addiction and dependence aren't any worse than they were before mobile betting was introduced. In fact, a significant portion of the revenue raised from the industry goes toward providing treatment and support for gambling addicts, meaning that the industry effectively provides for its own care and support.

Gambling and marijuana smoking will always be moral issues for some, and we know that there are some citizens living in New York who will always oppose both no matter which way the political wind is blowing and how the idea is presented. Right now, the wind is blowing in favor of legalizing them both in the near future. As we said toward the start of this article, we suspect it will be cannabis that gets the green light first, but if the objective is to balance the state's budget as quickly and easily as possible, there may be a lot more to

be said for making sports betting 2020s priority and leaving marijuana for 2021.