NYC 9/11 Public Portal Document

DAILY NEWS, MONDAY, DECEMBER 10, 2001

Plan to sell OTB to await Mayor Mike

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ALBANY — Mayor Giuliani's plan to sell the New York City Off-Track Betting Corp. to a group of Canadian investors is stuck at the gate, with lawmakers waiting for Mayor-elect Michael Bloomberg to make the next move.

Before the $250 million deal can be inked, it needs the approval of the Legislature. But Sen. William Larkin (R-New Windsor), who heads the Racing and Wagering Committee, has indefinitely put off hearings on the matter, saying it's only fair that the new mayor get a chance to weigh in on it.

"In deference to the next mayor, I think he should be provided with an opportunity to look at it and make some decisions," said Larkin. "Once [Bloomberg] takes a look at it and he feels he still wants to sell us, let him come up and sell us. Let him have his day in court."

The Giuliani administration had no comment on the bottleneck in Albany, but acknowledged the $250 million OTB payout was factored into the mayor's 2003 budget.

Bloomberg adviser Bill Cunningham thanked Larkin for "doing us a favor."

"It's a big chunk of dough that's built into the budget," he said of the proposed deal. "We need to look at it and be comfortable with the numbers."

If Giuliani gets his way, OTB would be sold to a partnership called GMR-NY, which is led by Magna Entertainment Corp. and is headed by Canadian tycoon Frank Stonach. The transaction is strongly opposed by the New York Racing Association, which lost out in the OTB bidding by ponying up an estimated $100 million less than GMR-NY offered.

The NYRA, which runs the Belmont, Aqueduct and Saratoga race tracks, usually wields considerable influence in Albany.

Meanwhile, New York City OTB is urging lawmakers to allow it to expand the number of races it simulcasts in its outlets, a move that OTB's lobbyist, Dan Wray, said would boost the city's annual take by $30 million. Last year, the city collected $39.2 million from $1 billion wagered in the city's OTB outlets.

"That's what our customers want and that's what we're looking to do," said Wray, who added that the infusion of cash would help the city at a time of sagging revenues.

The Legislature recently gave the green light to some harness tracks to install video lottery terminals to boost their business.

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