

Casino mogul Sheldon Adelson eyes Massachusetts market

Las Vegas Sands tycoon Sheldon Adelson, the first outsider to open a casino in Macau and whose company won a license to open the first casino in Singapore, now hopes to keep winning in Massachusetts.

Like other Las Vegas operators, Adelson is closely watching Governor Deval Patrick's campaign to bring casinos to Massachusetts. The governor's legislation would license three resort-style casinos, which he says would generate USD 400 million annually in tax revenue and 20,000 jobs.

Adelson, who ranked number 3 on Forbes' list of richest Americans with a net worth of USD 28 billion, likes Marlborough as one of the casino sites, believing it could lure gamblers from Connecticut two casinos. „It's the pivot point, the lynchpin of the distance you have to travel,“ he said of the Boston suburb near Interstates 495 and 90.

Before anything gets built, skeptical lawmakers need to be persuaded to expand gambling in Massachusetts. Adelson says Bay Staters already gamble on lottery tickets, horses and at Connecticut casinos.

Adelson has pledged to build with union workers in Boston, but longtime Las Vegas union activists predict his post-construction workforce would be nonunion. „He fights us vehemently. To say that he's going to build union is a throwaway line,“ said D. Taylor, secretary-treasurer of the Culinary Workers Union local 226 that represents 60,000 workers in Las Vegas.

While The Venetian was under construction, union activists sparred with Adelson. A federal court ruled in 1999 that The Venetian resort violated US labor law by trying to prevent

members of the culinary and bartenders unions from rallying on a sidewalk outside the casino. The Venetian resort is nonunion.

Adelson, whose cab driver father was a regular at the Suffolk Downs horse track in Boston, envisions a 300,000-square-foot resort with gambling, restaurants and entertainment, such as the Broadway musical „Jersey Boys“ – which will play early next year at his newest Las Vegas casino, The Palazzo.

Under Patrick’s bill, bidders who partner with a Massachusetts-based Indian tribe would get preference, but Adelson says he would prefer to bid on his own. He met with Patrick’s top economic advisers in May, and boasts he could build „the largest building in the world in two years.“ But he says he’d give Massachusetts’ government whatever design it wants.

Before building casinos, Adelson, a college dropout, worked as a financial adviser and real estate investor. He created the technology trade show Comdex in 1979, which he sold it to Japan’s Softbank Corp. for USD 860 million in 1995.

He bought the Sands Hotel and Casino, former home to Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, in 1989. Seven years later, he was inspired by his honeymoon in Venice to destroy it and erect The Venetian, a USD 1.5 billion casino resort.

The 4,000-suite resort prompted ridicule from gambling executives – who were focused mostly on gaming revenue – because it catered to business travelers and profited from hotel rooms. But it proved successful, and others followed suit.