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The Casino Control Commission takes seriously its job

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Gambling interests, and local governments and school districts seeking additional tax revenues, are anxious for the opening of the state's first two casinos, in Cleveland and Toledo. Wisely, regulators have slowed things down, delaying plans for the Cleveland casino to open March 26 and the Toledo casino to open April 2. New opening dates likely will be in May or June.

Members of the Casino Control Commission, chaired by Jo Ann Davidson, decided this week that thorough and complete licensing investigations must take place, taking precedence over the influx of jobs and money. Consultants advised the commission that additional time is needed to complete the necessary background checks.

Davidson and other commission members rightly emphasized that they will not cut corners when it comes to licensing the casinos. The commission members noted that the tentative opening dates were set by Penn National Gaming for Toledo and by Rock Ohio Caesars for Cleveland.

While some delays are expected in the first round of licensing, Penn National and Rock Ohio deserve blame for much of the slowdown. Rock Ohio initially balked at background checks for employees of casino vendors. Fortress Investment Group, the holding company for Penn National, still refuses to submit an application for background checks on its board of directors.

Casino operators, who wrote the constitutional amendment on gambling approved by voters, enjoy a monopoly in Ohio. The Casino Control Commission is providing the necessary counterweight by insisting on transparency and accountability.

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No rush

Casino commission should take its time in examining investors and vendors

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As state regulators review the license applications of the people and companies that want a piece of the action in Ohio's first two casinos, they should take all the time they need to get it right, ignoring pressure for a quick resolution.

Their very large responsibility is to ensure that the casinos are operated and serviced in an

aboveboard fashion by reputable people and companies. That requires thorough investigations of the backgrounds, track records and business associations of all those who would profit from the state-granted casino monopolies. This is new territory for Ohio and it's important to get it right.

The gambling interests that persuaded Ohio voters to approve casinos already have dealt themselves a ludicrously good deal. With voters' approval, they amended the Ohio Constitution to grant themselves a casino monopoly, virtually a license to print money.

This process circumvented the legislature, denying it the chance to shape the casino industry and wrest the best deal for Ohio taxpayers. So the Ohio Casino Control Commission represents the state's only opportunity to exercise meaningful influence.

Good for the commission for refusing to be pressured into hurrying up the license-review process. Casino owners Rock Ohio Caesars and Penn National Gaming have been pushing for a rush job ever since the commission took shape in March. Commission members were charged with creating from scratch a body of rules and policies to cover casinos.

When the commission was ready to begin accepting license applications in the summer, the casino owners said they hoped they could be approved in four to five months.

Rock wants to open its Cleveland casino on March 26 and Penn wants to open its Toledo location April 2.

But casino-license reviews typically take nine to 18 months elsewhere, and that's in locations where procedures already are established. The tight schedule urged by the casinos is unrealistic.

Moreover, part of the delay in license review has come from the fact that some investors and other interested parties have balked at complying with Ohio's information requests. The commission should wait as long as necessary for compliance.

The commission announced Wednesday that an early opening won't happen, and that May and June are more likely. That will be fine, as long as commission members are confident that all their questions have been answered.

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