

Gaming votes in 6 states overwhelmingly approved by voters

By [Richard N. Velotta](#) Las Vegas Review-Journal

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It could be days before some key political races are decided, but gaming issues in six states had decisive results in Tuesday's election — and they all passed.

Sports wagering measures were approved in Maryland, Louisiana and South Dakota, and casino gaming was authorized in Virginia. Betting limits were eliminated in Colorado, and Nebraska established a regulatory system for casino gaming at the state's racetracks.

Las Vegas-based gaming analysts say the approvals keep gaming expansion alive and show increased trust in the industry.

"States like Louisiana, South Dakota and Maryland have shown that voters will approve sports betting on the ballot in a meaningful way with the right education campaign," said Brendan Bussmann, director of government affairs for Global Market Advisors. "There are several potential states that will have to take this route, and these states can serve as a blueprint for how to get this accomplished."

“We believe Tuesday’s election results highlight a growing acceptance of gambling as a valuable industry to our economy,” Union Gaming analyst John DeCree said in a Wednesday report to investors.

DeCree said he expects to see more gambling expansion, particularly as states cope with widening budgets deficits.

The biggest sports betting expansion occurred in Maryland, where more than 66 percent of voters approved Question 2. Approval of the measure will benefit MGM Resorts International, Caesars Entertainment Inc., Penn National Gaming Inc., Golden Entertainment Inc. and Churchill Downs Inc., which have operating properties in the state.

The smallest sports betting opportunity: South Dakota. In that state, approval of Constitutional Amendment B gives the gaming town of Deadwood and the state’s 11 tribal casinos legalized sports betting.

“Although a small gaming state, voter approval does help build on the growing regulatory momentum behind sports betting,” DeCree said.

In Louisiana, 55 of 64 parishes voted for sports betting — more than the 47 that voted to approve Daily Fantasy Sports in 2018.

The state’s Legislature will now develop regulations and tax rates and possibly include Daily Fantasy Sports oversight at the same time. Work is expected to take most of 2021 to complete.

Virginia voters came out strong for casinos in four cities that already have aligned with casino partners. Bristol, aligned with Hard Rock International, showed the largest margin of victory, 72 percent of the vote. That was

followed by Danville (Caesars Entertainment), 69 percent; Portsmouth (Rush Street Gaming), 67 percent; and Norfolk (Pamunkey Indian Tribe), 65 percent.

Caesars issued a post-election statement late Tuesday.

“Caesars Entertainment thanks the voters of Danville for their support of the referendum that will bring Caesars Virginia to Danville,” Caesars CEO Tom Reeg said in an email.

“We look forward to fulfilling the trust the voters have placed in us by bringing 1,300 good-paying jobs, tourism dollars and economic development to the city, and we are incredibly excited to begin construction,” he said.

Nebraska was the biggest surprise of election night, Bussmann said, because of how poorly both sides of the issue handled their educational campaigns.

Nebraska Gov. Pete Ricketts and billionaire Warren Buffet, an Omaha resident, opposed the three gaming measures.

Measures approved by voters will introduce casino gaming to six existing racetracks, form the Nebraska Gaming Commission and establish a 20 percent tax rate on gaming.

“This was more of a benchmark of where the voters stand on gaming than anything influenced one way or another by the campaigns on three initiatives that allow ‘all games of chance’ in the Cornhusker State,” Bussmann said. “The challenge remains on how quickly it will get established and how far the expansion goes.”

In Colorado, where Amendment 77, approved with 60 percent of the vote, will eliminate the \$100-per-bet limit on wagers, gaming will be expanded with the

introduction of new games. Casinos in Central City, Black Hawk and Cripple Creek will now be able to add baccarat, pai gow, keno and Big 6 wheels.

Contact Richard N. Velotta at rvelotta@reviewjournal.com or 702-477-3893.

Follow [@RickVelotta](https://twitter.com/RickVelotta) on Twitter.