



# Unions gird for battle over casinos

By Scott Van Voorhis

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Bay State unions are preparing to play hard ball on Beacon Hill in an all-out drive to win approval for casino gambling.

State labor leaders - as they prepare for an annual confab next week organized by the Massachusetts AFL-CIO - are weighing a revamp of the rating system by which legislators are judged on their records on labor issues.

One concern is that lawmakers can win high marks by voting for lots of noncontroversial bills, even as they fail to follow the union line on big issues such as expanded gambling.

Some union officials are urging the state AFL-CIO to significantly reduce a lawmaker's labor rating if he or she fails to back the union on a key issue such as casinos, said state Rep. Brian Wallace (D-South Boston), who attended a recent strategy session.

It is a view endorsed by Louis Ciarlone, president and business manager of IBEW Local 123, which represents workers at Suffolk Downs, the site of a proposed casino.

"We have to fight fire with fire," Ciarlone said. "You can't be with us 99 times and buck us on this."

Meanwhile, winning a low rating from the AFL-CIO could have dire consequences for some lawmakers as they face re-election, Wallace said.

Overall, the Massachusetts AFL-CIO rates lawmakers' voting records on a percentage scale, measuring how many times they line up behind bills endorsed by the labor group. If a legislator's labor rating falls below a certain threshold, the union stops making campaign contributions, Wallace said.

"It's an election year. Having labor with you in a district like mine, it makes a big difference," Wallace said.

Labor leaders are looking for ways to pressure recalcitrant lawmakers as unions prepare to aggressively lobby for Gov. [Deval Patrick](#)'s casino proposal. The casinos will create thousands of new jobs, union officials contend.

"We have to fight at least as hard as the governor is going to fight on this," Ciarlone said.