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## BUSINESS

Tuesday, Mar. 17, 2009

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# Casinos get tax incentives

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**TEXT SIZE:**

Gov. Haley Barbour signed a bill Tuesday that gives tax incentives for casino companies to build non-gambling related amenities including theme parks, hotels, golf courses, convention centers and others.

House Bill 1467, which Rep. Diane Peranich, D-Pass Christian, championed along with other Coast lawmakers over the last few years, recently cleared the Legislature and it became law with Barbour's signature.

"This bill allows Mississippi tourism to take another big step in enhancing our appeal to visitors," Barbour said. "As we know, once people step foot in Mississippi, they fall in love with its beauty and the hospitality of its people."

Peranich said she believes if the bill had passed a few years ago, some planned projects, including Margaritaville in Biloxi, would have been completed by now. But its passing is still good news. She said it also sends a signal that the state is friendly to casinos and that might keep some companies from cutting jobs here and also give them encouragement to pursue projects here in the future.

"We are very grateful," Peranich said.

Ron Peresich of the Gulf Coast Business Council, which has supported the bill, said the measure will help the area tremendously by giving casinos the same tax incentives that are offered to other



ROGELIO V. SOLIS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS Gov. Haley Barbour signs a casino incentive bill Tuesday in Jackson.

businesses in the state.

"It means that the companies that have the most money to spend can get the same tax incentives as everybody else," Peresich said.

Peranich has said the measure is crucial because it would likely be an engine to create jobs and it wouldn't cost the state, as the incentives would be paid from a portion of the sales tax that the project creates. Proponents of the measure also said it would help increase family-related tourism options.

For the last few years, anti-gambling forces in the Senate have killed the measure. But House Gaming Chairman Bobby Moak, D-Bogue Chitto, said he was glad the Senate approved the measure. He said in addition to the aid it could offer projects in South Mississippi, many projects in the Tunica area are also hoping to take advantage of the incentives.

"From the top of the state all the way down to the Coast, it is good for the state," Moak said.