Pot opt-out filed

Lawmaker's bill would let Nassau skip sales should state OK program

BY SCOTT EIDLER
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A Nassau County bill filed Monday would let the county opt out of legalized recreational marijuana sales should the state approve the program.

Legis. Joshua Lafazan of Woodbury, who caucuses with Democrats but is not registered with a political party, filed the bill Monday after a county task force studying marijuana legalization published a 107-page report recommending Nassau "opt out of all cannabis related commercial businesses." Lafazan and Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder were co-chairs of the panel.

The report found, "numerous potential public safety and public health concerns that need to be addressed well before Nassau County could begin to participate in any cannabis related businesses."

Lafazan's bill would prohibit the cultivation, sale, distribution, public consumption and marketing of recreational cannabis products.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo in January proposed a bill to legalize recreational marijuana sales that allowed counties or cities with more than 100,000 residents to opt out of the program.

Nassau County Executive Laura Curran, a Democrat, launched the marijuana task force in January, and last week announced her opposition to legalize marijuana sales.

"It has become very clear that when it comes to the legalized sale of marijuana in Nassau County, now is not the time," Curran said during a news conference in Farmingdale.

"I've concluded that right now, its costs would outweigh the benefits," Curran said. "It remains unclear how much, if any, revenue would actually come into the county, so we didn't feel like we were able

Nassau Executive Laura Curran and Woodbury Legis. Josh Lafazan announce a new Marijuana Task Force report recommending the opt-out measure in Farmingdale. ■ Video: newsday.com/nassau

to do a proper cost-benefit analysis."

Ryder said "the report is unbiased," noting he spoke with groups that support legalizing recreational sales.

"We get the argument, but it's way too early to understand what the damage could do to us, and it's way too early to understand what . . . revenue is going to be generated for the county," Ryder said at the news conference.

But Doug Greene, legislative director of Empire State NORML, the New York chapter of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws, said Monday that with details of the state legislation under review, "we think it's premature to opt out."

A Siena Poll released Monday found that 53 percent of New Yorkers support legalized recreational marijuana sales, while 43 percent are op-

posed. In the suburbs, legalization supporters outnumber opponents 50 percent to 43 percent.

The Nassau County Task Force on Marijuana Legalization and Regulation cited public health and safety concerns, including the risk of marijuana consumption to adolescents and pregnant women.

The report highlighted the danger of cannabis use disorder, with symptoms including impairment and distress. The panel also warned of increased law enforcement costs for localities, including for officer training to detect drug-impaired motorists.

"The small revenue share is immaterial and evidences the true intent of the law: to raise additional new revenues for the state while preying on the massive compliance and enforcement implementation almost unfunded, to their levels

of government. This is untenable," the report said.

"At the beginning of this process, the word revenue was at the forefront of everyone's mind on this task force," Lafazan said in an interview Sunday. "The task force became unanimous in our agreement, just like alcohol in our country, the costs far outweigh the revenues."

Presiding Officer Richard Nicolello (R-New Hyde Park) said through a spokesman: "The Republican Majority will be voting to opt out and will look to strengthen the proposed resolution."

Last week, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, a Democrat, said he would propose county opt-out legislation. The Suffolk bill would have a sunset provision making marijuana sales legal after the first year, unless the Suffolk County Legislature were to extend the moratorium.

POLL: LOSING AMAZON WAS BAD FOR NY

BY YANCEY ROY
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Most voters in the state say losing Amazon was a bad deal for New York, according to a new poll released Monday.

The new Siena Research Institute survey found that 67 percent responded that way to Amazon's decision last month to drop plans for a second headquarters in Queens. In comparison, 21 percent said it was good. Every breakdown by region, voter registration and political philosophy showed support for Amazon.

"Even 56 percent of self-described liberals think it was bad for New York," said Steven Greenberg, spokesman for the Siena poll. "While some may have celebrated Amazon's announcement to pull the plug, the vast majority of New Yorkers of every stripe thought it was bad for the Empire State."

The retail giants scrapped plans for a second headquarters in Long Island City, following escalating criticism about a $3 billion package in state and New York City tax incentives and Amazon's opposition to a unionized workforce. The company had said the Queens facility would have employed 25,000.

Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, a Democrat who helped negotiate the incentive package, has been critical of Amazon opponents. He and his staff have talked to the company about reconsidering, but said it's unlikely. He reiterated that Monday in a radio interview saying, "The horse is out the barn."

In a Siena question about who was the "hero" or "villain" in the Amazon saga, a plurality of Democrats (36 percent) said Amazon was the villain. A majority of Republicans (60 percent), as well as a plurality of independent and minor-party voters (43 percent), blamed Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-Bronx), who had no role in the deal or future oversight but who had become a face of the opposition to corporate giveaways.

The poll of 700 registered voters was conducted March 10-14. It has margin of error of 4.2 percentage points.

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