

CardboardBox: US state says employees must go if gambling is not legalised

The US State of Pennsylvania is in financial crisis - and the Governor says that widespread redundancies - which it charmingly calls "furloughs" of state employees will follow if the General Assembly fails to legalise table games in the state's existing casinos.

When the current budget was adopted last October, the General Assembly and the administration led by Governor Edward G. Rendell agreed that the state would raise USD250 million through legalisation of table games at Pennsylvania's licensed casinos, which currently allow only slot machine gambling.

The Governor announced last month that eliminating positions would be one of the steps necessary to plug the USD250 million hole left in the budget if the state does not enact gaming legislation. The Governor set a deadline of 8 January for table games legislation to be passed otherwise before he would begin the furlough process.

Yesterday, Rendell instructed his Secretary of Administration, Naomi Wyatt, to write to all state departments that report direct to the Cabinet. The memo said

To be prepared in the event a gaming bill is not enacted, enclosed is a list that provides each of you with a furlough target for your agency. The list was developed by spreading 1,000 furloughs proportionally across all agencies' general fund complement as of December 11, 2009. (Federal, restricted, billed, and special fund complement was excluded; split-funded complement was included.)

Please begin developing a plan to implement the furloughs associated with your agency. Your plan should anticipate that furloughs could occur before the end of January. We will schedule a meeting in early January to provide additional details and information.

The total number of redundancies has been set at 995 out of a total of 51,577 positions. But although the percentages are broadly similar across departments, some will find the reductions harder to manage than others. For example, The Governor's Office will lost one of 58 positions - which will not be difficult to cover for; but prisons (known as "corrections") will lose 299

out of 15,436 positions. However, the prisons service is not considered overstaffed and the reductions will, inevitably, be amongst front line officers raising the spectre of problems amongst the prison population.