

Young people mobilize against casinos

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A group of young people from Penghu County yesterday urged other residents of the archipelago working in Taiwan proper to return home and vote against gambling in an upcoming referendum on allowing corporations to establish casinos in Penghu.

At a press conference in Taipei, Liu Yu-ming (劉宇明), a student at National Taiwan University's Graduate Institute of Law, warned that Penghu's image and reputation as a natural paradise could be tarnished if residents voted "yes" in the referendum.

Describing the referendum as a "turning point in history," Liu said residents of the islands were faced with the question of whether to embrace a luxurious lifestyle and give up their modest ways.

Liu said businesses in Penghu would suffer if casinos were allowed to operate there.

Hsueh Kuan-chung (許寬中), a college graduate from Penghu living in Kaohsiung, said the establishment of casinos in Penghu would exacerbate the problems the island county is facing.

The anti-gambling activists' call came ahead of the nation's first referendum on the establishment of casinos, which will be held in Penghu on Saturday.

The referendum will pose the question: "Should Penghu establish international resorts, along with casinos?"

The Referendum Act (公職法) stipulates that two thresholds need to be reached for a referendum to be valid.

First, more than 50 percent of eligible voters need to cast a referendum ballot, and second, of the valid votes, 50 percent of the voters need to respond in the affirmative for the referendum to be passed.

However, unlike the previous referendums held in Taiwan in recent years, the casino referendum will be considered valid if more than half of the valid votes are in the affirmative.

The issue of legalizing gambling on outlying islands has been debated on and off for more than a decade, since long before the legislature approved related legislation on Jan. 12.

The activists said they are concerned about the possible impact on students' values, the survival of local businesses, social stability and the environment if casinos are built on the islands, while those who support the establishment have trumpeted the potential economic benefits casinos would bring.

Yen Tz-chieh (顏澤吉), a graduate student of political science, said the group of young people

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was trying to mobilize family and friends through MSN Messenger, Plurk and e-mail.

About 200 young people from Penghu planned to return to cast a negative vote in the referendum, Yen said.

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