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Reporters and editors: Members of the media are invited to attend the opening and closing sessions of the community conversations.

DURHAM, N.H. – As the hot-button issue of expanded gambling comes to a head in New Hampshire this spring, a series of community conversations will be held around the state to discuss the risks and benefits of expanded gambling. Several hundred New Hampshire citizens from around the state will participate in facilitated small-group dialogues on Saturday, Feb. 13, 2010, in 11 cities and towns statewide.

“This process is not intended to reach a single conclusion or group consensus, but rather to capture the essence of the participants’ diversity of views — and why those views are important to this issue — as well as their hopes, concerns, and new ideas for the Study Commission to consider,” says University of New Hampshire professor of education Bruce Mallory, who will lead this process. The results of the conversations will be presented in a summary report of citizen views to the Governor’s Study Commission on Expanded Gaming this spring.

Mallory adds that this process of engaging citizens on a critical public policy question through a community-based deliberative process is expected to serve as a national model.

Called “What’s at Stake,” the project will convene small groups, ranging from six to 15 participants who represent a wide diversity of demographics, walks of life and lifestyles, and attitudes toward gambling, to ensure that the conversations represent the diverse experiences and views of New Hampshire citizens. UNH Cooperative Extension will assist with community outreach and facilitator training.

The conversations run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (lunch is included) in Berlin, Concord, Conway, Keene, Laconia, Lebanon, Littleton, Manchester, Portsmouth, Rochester and Salem. Opening and closing sessions of each conversation will be open to the general public. To participate in a conversation or learn more about the project, go to www.whatsatstake.unh.edu.

Funding was provided by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.

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