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GRAND RAPIDS BUSINESS JOURNAL *EXPRESS*

BECAUSE BUSINESS CAN'T WAIT

OPINION

Governor, Sign The Gun Lake Compact

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The proposed Gun Lake casino now has a name. It should also have a signed compact with Gov. Jennifer Granholm. The fraud perpetrated against the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomie Indians should be put to rest, and even if forgiven, not forgotten. Not in this election year.

A full year has passed since the U.S. Department of Interior announced it would take the land in trust, a step that gives the band the right to begin construction of its 147-acre casino and \$250 million renovation of a largely vacant site. It is supported by every surrounding chamber of commerce and surrounding communities, including Kalamazoo, which have rare economic development opportunities to look forward to in the casino creation.

Further, the tribe has weathered a rather preposterous lawsuit challenge. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia in January ruled a suit brought against Dowagiac's Pokagon Band of Pottawatomie Indians is "specious" and has "no merit." It is the tactic and exactly same suit filed by Grand Rapids opponents to the casino. The federal court will not have any new decision.

Gun Lake will have a casino, and it makes no sense whatsoever that the governor would continue to wait to negotiate a compact that produces revenue for the state, offers jobs in an area continuing to suffer from manufacturing losses and provides a large boost to area tourism.

Another year has passed since the Business Journal wrote here of the impropriety of the action taken by a handful of business owners who make speeches every day about "compassionate capitalism" and free trade, but have attempted to block (Native) Americans from participating in that system.

Much of their rhetoric has been veiled by "concerns" about "morality," but as the testimony used in the fraud conviction of lobbyist Jack Abramoff now shows, the concern should be with the morality of the underwriters of the opposition campaign. It is even more grievous when one considers that the band was among those targeted by the

federal government and forced on the Trail of Tears. The unfairness of state inaction only to the Gun Lake Tribe has been a four-year trail of tears, and it should be ended, swiftly.

The politicians feigning indignation over the casino plan should be held in the public square as representational of how far some West Michigan politicians are willing to cross the line to let money influence their thinking. It is a very bad spot for gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, a member of the casino opposition group, and for U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra, who in 1993 endorsed the “just and equitable treatment” the Manistee Little River Band deserved as its land was put in trust for a casino. Hoekstra more recently joined the opposition to the Gun Lake casino.

The long and nasty attempt to undercut the Gun Lake Band is finished by federal action, as it should be. The tribe is due its sovereign rights. The governor should bring the compact to Bradley and offer the “photo op” of fairness. **BJX**

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