

## Recognize reality, accept compact

### Our view/Wayland casino

Thursday, August 16, 2007

Local legislators have been fighting a determined rear-guard campaign against the plan by the Gun Lake Band of Pottawotami Indians to build a casino near U.S. 131 in Wayland.

But their efforts may be in vain. The state House has approved a compact between the state and the tribe that gives state and local governments a share in its revenue. Now, only approval by the state Senate stands between the tribe and full state sanction of the gambling facility.

We have not been casino supporters -- we don't believe it's what the people of Allegan County want and we don't believe it will provide a significant economic boost to the area. However, we believe it's time to recognize that the casino is not going to be stopped. Federal, not state, law regulates Native American casinos, and while desperate legal efforts by casino opponents continue to try to block the facility, the law is on the Gun Lake Band's side and it is likely that the federal government will formally put the Wayland property in trust for the tribe later this year -- the last hurdle that must be crossed before construction can begin on the \$200 million casino.

The compact, negotiated by Gov. Jennifer Granholm and approved by the House, represents the best deal state and local governments can get. The tribe can open a casino without any agreement with the state. The lack of a compact would mean the casino couldn't offer Las Vegas-style table games, but the absence of a deal also would mean no money at all for local governments, which would still have to bear the burden of additional police and road costs. The compact, which passed 63-41 in the House, would give the state 8 to 12 percent of the casino's take from slot machines and an additional 2 percent for local governments, in return for limited exclusivity in a nine-county area.

Michigan should grab what income it can from the casino, because we don't expect much of an economic boost to come from it -- the economic development promises of casinos across the country have proven illusory more often than not for everyone but the operators and their investors. Casino gambling in Wayland will rearrange entertainment spending in West Michigan, but with 21 casinos already operating in Michigan it's difficult to imagine the Wayland facility drawing people from other parts of the state. The

Aug. 2 opening of the huge new Four Winds casino in New Buffalo -- the second biggest in the state -- likely will draw away a big chunk of the Gun Lake Band's potential business.

The prospects for the compact in the state Senate are uncertain; it's not even clear when the chamber will take it up. We recognize the sincerity and conviction of casino opponents, but we believe the best course of action is for the Senate to approve the compact to make sure all the legal controls are in place before the Gun Lake Band begins construction. (We also hope the Legislature won't waste time on Rep. Fulton Sheen's silly proposal to set up toll booths outside Native American lands and charge people \$10 to enter.)

We would rather see the energy of casino opponents dedicated to reforming the federal government's defective system of Indian gambling law so that Native American tribal sovereignty is balanced by the legitimate right of local governments to have some say in the placement and operation of casinos. It's too late to get in the way of the Gun Lake Band casino, and we should deal with that reality.