



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Wayland casino seems a sure bet

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Few things stir the passions like casino gambling, it seems.

And by casino gambling, we mean three new facilities in west Michigan: New Buffalo, Battle Creek and, in all likelihood, a few miles up U.S. 131 in Wayland Township. The first is scheduled to open this spring; the second hopes to break ground this year; and the third is contingent on an appeals court ruling that finally would allow the federal government to take land into trust for the Gun Lake Band of Pottawatomí Indians. Once that case is settled in favor of the tribe -- and we're confident it will be -- it won't be long before a casino begins to take shape on that land.

Opposition to all three over the years has been fierce, persistent ... and fruitless, unless you believe bitter feelings, years of delays and countless thousands of dollars spent on attorney fees are signs of success. Opponents have included state lawmakers, local business people, Grand Rapids business leaders, including defeated gubernatorial candidate Dick DeVos, several well-funded political action committees and even disgraced former lobbyist Jack Abramoff.

The opposition of these folks -- well, most of them anyway -- comes from the heart. They want what's best for the people and the economy of the region, and they don't see casinos adding much to either the social or the economic atmosphere.

Casinos just take money from working people's pockets, they say, and siphon business from other enterprises that could offer other products, services and jobs. They worry that casinos won't pay a fair share of the take to state and local governments, and that any jobs created will pay poorly.

Of course, there's just as much passion on the side of the tribes and their supporters. In the case of the Gun Lake Band, there's nothing less than a home for the tribe at stake, and its members have spent years fighting court battles to win the same rights other tribes have.

Tribal officials promise hundreds of jobs at the casino they want to build, plus hundreds more to provide the products and services the casino will use. They also have agreed to share with local and state governments percentages of some gaming revenues under a deal reached Friday with the governor.

It's time for passion to take a seat and reason to prevail. Common sense tells us the Gun Lake Band should have every right every other tribe has, and that it's time to stop the pointless appeals and nasty rhetoric.

The question now is not whether we should allow an Indian tribe to build a casino near U.S. 131 a few miles north of here. The question is how we can work toward a future that is mutually beneficial to our communities, governments and the tribe.

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