

OPINIONS

HYPOCRISY AT CENTER OF GRAND RAPIDS CASINO IDEA



By Dr. José A. Flores

Grand Rapids, Michigan is an "interesting" place to live. Some local big business leaders have been trying to thwart the efforts of the Gun Lake Tribe to establish a Casino in near-by Wayland Township. Some of these businessmen formed a group called 23 is Enough and condemned gambling, the Wayland Casino project and American Indians. They waged a political and legal war against the tribe placing an anti-gambling proposal before Michigan voters. The anti-casino group's critics lashed out with racist propaganda as they filled the Grand Rapids Press with their twisted editorials. They used internet and other media to attack the Indians and deplored their quest for a Casino using moral and Christian values as their banners.

We all easily forget what Native Americans have endured in our country. Their land was stolen from them...they were killed off in a genocide fashion in the Americas...their treaties with our government were mostly broken and they were rounded up and placed on reservations. We conveniently forget the disadvantage American Indians experience in education, business, industry and the like. Many of us are unaware of our nation's history. We fail to recognize how similar the African American, Mexican American and Native American histories are linked. Our groups were enslaved in the Americas, were treated as less than human by people who believed in their superiority, (a belief that is still alive and well in some interesting places today), and we were forced to be subservient all of our lives.

Recent federal and state approvals of American Indian land in trust and a compact with the state give the Wayland Band of Pottawatomie Indians an opportunity to build a future income stream for their tribe similar to other tribes in the United States. But, there is a plot by our local "rich and famous elite" to stop them again by "stealing their thunder". The pitch by Peter Secchia, one of the leaders of 23 Is Enough, is foul fodder for the elite, regardless of how he crafts it. He is now suggesting that it could help our city and county governments pay for parks and special projects. I won't be led by this hypocrisy and suggest that you don't either.

We should all be grateful for the actions of Governor Jennifer Granholm in approving a state compact with the Gun Lake Tribe which guarantees revenues for the state from Casino profits. We suggest to our legislators that they support exclusivity in West Michigan for the Wayland group's Casino. Grand Rapids' big boys should control their greed and allow our American Indian brothers and sisters a chance to enjoy "Michigan's West Coast" too! Economic prosperity for West Michigan American Indians is prosperity well deserved.