

Grand Rapids Press

Tuesday, May 24, 2005

Disrespectful to Native Americans

This is a response to a comment by 23 is Enough's spokesman John Helmholdt in a May 16 article in The Grand Rapids Press. He said, "This is a Michigan tribe being manipulated by a Las Vegas casino company that just wants to bring West Michigan money back to Las Vegas." We are very saddened and appalled by the comment made by Mr. Helmholdt. Mr. Helmholdt's comment is severely disrespectful to our tribal membership and to Native Americans everywhere. His quote implies that Native Americans are not capable of determining their own future.

We take strong offense to the notion that we are being manipulated by anyone. To assert such an ill-conceived notion like this is a scare tactic based on stereotypes. It conjures up images of the paternalistic relationship between the federal government and Native Americans from a bygone era.

Not only does this statement by 23 is Enough smack of insensitivity, it is also factually incorrect. MPM Enterprises, of which Station Casinos is a partner, is merely the manager of the casino and will receive a management fee of not more than 30 percent of the net revenue for a period not to exceed 7 years as codified in federal law.

Approximately 85 percent of the revenue will remain in this region -- the tribe cannot relocate to another part of the country.

Furthermore, the tribe will always own the casino. Even during the time we have a management partner the tribe will always control the decision-making process concerning all aspects of the casino by virtue of the fact we hold a majority on the board of directors.

Our tribe is a sovereign government. Our efforts to open a gaming facility are part of a larger goal to achieve economic self-sufficiency. The issue of the casino has been politicized enough.

COLEEN NESSNER

Chair of the Elders Council

Gun Lake Tribe

Wyoming