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Anti-casino letter showed a lack of understanding of the facts

Tuesday, May 30, 2006

By John Shagonaby

Before Tommy Brann and 23 is Enough's gambling story is complete, I must correct numerous statements made by Brann in his letter on May 8, "Casino objection based on competition."

The Gun Lake Casino will contribute significantly to state and local taxes and the economy. Under terms of a compact the tribe is willing to sign, revenue-sharing payments in lieu of taxes will far exceed all combined taxes collected from businesses like Brann's Steak House.

Brann's letter displayed a fundamental lack of understanding that the Gun Lake Tribe is a government, recognized as such by the framers of the U.S. Constitution, and validated in numerous decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.

The tribe is not a business organization. That is the reason the tribe doesn't pay the same taxes Brann does, but neither does the state of Michigan. Governments can't tax other governments -- Michigan doesn't pay taxes to Ohio.

However, under terms of a compact, the tribe will pay well over \$10 million directly to the state and local governments in the first year of operation.

To put that figure into perspective, compare it to the \$30,000 in annual property tax paid to Wayland Township! Such is the case for all Indian casinos operating under compacts.

In regards to taxes paid on alcohol, tobacco and gasoline, Brann is just plain wrong. A few of the state's tribes own a gas station, and sell tobacco and gas at their gas station to tribal members (Indians) free of state taxes. All other non-member customers, about 99.99 percent of tribal business, must pay tax on these products no different than if they were buying from the 23 is Enough gas station.

Here's an even more important fact, collection of taxes on tobacco and gasoline are issues that can be addressed under terms of a compact! Sounds like a logical reason to enter into an agreement, does it not?

In addition to these logical examples of how a compact could address Brann's concerns, consider that gaming compacts have resulted in payments of more than \$389 million to the state and local governments.

Brann's concern about fair competition, in general, is misplaced. We have not proposed a casino to compete in the restaurant business, we are going into business to compete in the gaming market. And contrary to Brann's unfounded accusations, you will not find tables of free crab legs at the casino.

The tribe has only pointed out the relevant issue that Brann's opposition to the casino is rooted in his membership in a self-proclaimed "statewide anti-gaming organization," while he is reaping the profits from electronic lottery gaming. That is hypocritical, pure and simple.

John Shagonaby is the Gun Lake Tribal Council treasurer. He resides in Dorr.

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