



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Tribes will pay its fair share, all will benefit

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By Roger VanVolkinburg

I've been involved in Allegan County politics for some time now. Currently, I serve as the supervisor of Wayland Township, host of the proposed Gun Lake Casino.

Opponents of this project claim the Gun Lake tribe isn't going to pay its fair share of taxes. I totally disagree and feel this is nothing more than another baseless scare tactic. Trust land will not adversely impact our tax rolls or our local businesses.

Long ago, the township took a long hard look at other municipalities that host tribal casinos. It didn't take long to realize that local governments surrounding tribal casinos received much more money in revenue sharing than they ever would in taxes had the property not been placed in trust. And, local tourism and businesses have boomed in tribal casino areas, also contrary to the opposition's claims.

The land the casino will occupy now generates annual property taxes of about \$30,000 for Wayland Township. After the tribe's land goes into trust, it will no longer pay property taxes, and the tribe itself will not be taxed. The reason is simple: governments do not tax other governments.

However, under the gaming compact signed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm, the casino would instead pay more than \$3 million annually to local governments. That's right: \$30,000 vs. \$3 million -- take your pick.

Now add to our tax base the casino employees, vendors, contractors and all other non-tribal entities doing business with the tribe, who will pay required local, state and federal taxes. Any claim by the opposition contrary to this is simply false.

Also, under the compact, the tribe agreed to comply with all state laws regulating the taxation of alcohol and tobacco. Yet another reason for our Legislature to approve this compact.

Imagine, 1,800 new casino employees earning an average compensation package of \$40,000 annually. Many of those currently unemployed or on government assistance are not paying taxes. These folks will now have income to spend locally on goods, services and recreation. That will benefit local business owners and create even more jobs.

More revenue for local businesses and more job creation will generate a larger local tax base. This will increase revenue for increased municipal services and improved roads. This is why the township Board of Trustees sees this project as a "win-win."

Everyone from Uncle Sam to Gov. Granholm agrees this casino will be built in the near future. Therefore, local government, public safety and law enforcement have an ethical duty to prepare for this project.

A signed and legislatively approved gaming compact will easily provide the funding to offset the loss of property taxes. The compact will also create a proven revenue stream to build roads and necessary infrastructure, and ensure the public's safety.

I ask you as the Wayland Township supervisor not to listen to the opposition's argument about taxes. The tribe will pay their fair share and then some, while playing a major role in helping our communities grow in a positive way. Enough delay. We need jobs today.

Roger VanVolkinburg is the

supervisor of Wayland Township.

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