



## **LETTER: Where is support for tribal casino opposition coming from?**

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Michigan's experience with tribal casinos has been very positive. There exudes an atmosphere of respect and cooperation between the local units of government, tribes and the Gaming Control Board.

We in Michigan have had a positive experience with tribal casino operations. There is no increase in violent or other crimes in the area of the casinos as many have alleged. Local units of government currently receive anywhere from \$800,000 to \$7 million annually in 2 percent payments for public safety, police, fire and EMS as provided by the Tribal-State Compacts. The local governments also receive funding for other projects important to their communities under the existing tribal-state compacts. The 2 percent semi-annual payments to the local units far exceeds the ad valorem taxes lost when the property is taken into federal trust and removed from the local tax rolls.

In a recent letter to the editor, the head of an opposition group claimed the Gun Lake Tribe could simply stop paying local governments 2 percent of its future casino revenue, if a competing casino opened in Grand Rapids ("What if?' scenarios get in way of facts," March 21). I have heard that before and it is not true. The Indian Gaming Section of the MGCB is charged with ensuring that does not occur. We have never had a Michigan tribal casino operation stop paying their 2 percent payments.

The Gun Lake Casino compact signed by Governor Jennifer M. Granholm is the same as all other tribal gaming compacts. Local revenue sharing payments do not hinge on exclusivity of gaming operations. All current gaming tribes pay local revenue sharing regardless of exclusivity. The same will be true for the Gun Lake, Pokagon and Nottawaseppi Tribes.

The tribal casinos provide needed local employment in the area of any casino. It is important to remember that non-Native Americans are filling the overwhelming majority of the casino jobs, more than 75 percent. With the exception of a Native American that lives on the reservation, who is not required to pay state income tax, all casino employees (native and non-natives) pay all federal taxes, FICA, state unemployment tax, property taxes, state sales tax, liquor, gas, motor vehicle and cigarette taxes and spend their income in the local communities they live in.

It has been almost nine years and 1998 compacted tribes and tribes like the Gun Lake Tribe currently without a compact are being contested from opening by an unseen hand that does want anymore Michigan tribal casinos. It is apparent that there are strong "forces" behind the scenes blocking of the Michigan tribes' efforts to open casinos. It goes beyond those signing letters on behalf of these groups.

It is really sad to see the needy Michigan Indians with record unemployment and living in poverty that could have been self-sufficient, if their casino was allowed to open. It begs the question: where is the support for these targeted delays directed at the Michigan tribes' casinos coming from? Are these grassroots efforts really against employment and increase tax revenues for many Michigan communities or against the tribes' eventual success?

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