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**Gun Lake casino would promote responsible gambling**

Saturday, December 24, 2005

**Special To The Press**

Dr. James Dobson's anti-gambling guest column (Press, Nov. 25) contained inaccuracies. While 98 percent to 99 percent of the U.S. population is able to participate in gambling activities without any ill effects, the Gun Lake Tribe recognizes that those who are unable to gamble responsibly must have access to education and treatment programs that will help them gain control of their addiction.

To that end, we are proactively working to ensure adequate education, training and treatment programs are a part of our proposed gaming and entertainment complex in Wayland. Our employees will be required to go through an extensive and ongoing training process to ensure that they recognize problem gambling warning signs and have the tools necessary to refer guests to organizations where they can get help. Our guests will also be reminded of problem gambling warning signs and organizations. Educational materials explaining how to seek help will be located throughout the casino.

We also are working to make significant financial contributions to local problem gambling treatment providers and education programs under the terms of a Michigan tribal-state gaming compact.

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Mr. Dobson's incendiary examples of death and destruction resulting from legalized gaming could just as easily be applied to the cause of an untold number of tragedies. We could recite numerous horror stories of robberies and theft that have occurred since time immemorial due to the hopelessness

and despair of poverty, mental illness or drug abuse. Gambling addiction is not the only societal ill that causes destruction.

Gambling is a legalized entertainment activity in 48 states. The State of Michigan legalized gambling within its borders long ago. Betting on horse racing was legalized in the 1950s. In 1972 the Michigan lottery was passed by a statewide vote of the people and in 1996 Michigan voters passed Proposal E, legalizing three commercial casinos in Detroit. Charitable gaming is and has been conducted in abundance for many years throughout the state of Michigan.

Mr. Dobson references his service on the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, which retained the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago to study the effect of casino introduction in 100 communities across the country. What he failed to share was that the NORC found that the introduction of casinos into new jurisdictions decreases unemployment (by an average of 12 percent) and reduces government assistance expenditures such as welfare and unemployment payments.

The NORC study also found that the introduction of casinos into new jurisdictions has no statistically significant impact on bankruptcy filings and crime rates, and only about 1 percent of the population is categorized as a problem gambler. This number is dramatically lower than the percentage of Americans afflicted by drugs, alcohol and depression (10 percent to 14 percent). Mr. Dobson should be well aware of these facts, yet he conveniently omits them.

Regulation and enforcement at Michigan's commercial and tribal casinos is working, as evidenced by the very statistics Mr. Dobson uses to argue against casinos. Thousands of people under the age of 21 attempted to enter Detroit casinos last year, but were caught! The answer to preventing underage gambling is regulation and enforcement and Michigan is at the forefront of those efforts.

Indian gaming in Michigan is in no way comparable to states such as California, where more than 50 tribal casinos are in operation. The opening of Michigan's last Indian casino happened last century -- 1999.

A popular perception about anti-gambling groups such as MichGo and Taxpayers of Michigan Against Casinos is that they may be acting as front organizations for competing casinos trying to prevent competition. Unfortunately, there is no way of verifying whom they speak for and how they are funded.

The reality is casino gambling is a legal activity in Michigan. We intend to take our role and responsibility as a member of the Indian gaming industry very seriously and will work to ensure that those who enter our facility gamble responsibly.

JOHN SHAGONABY

Tribal Council Treasurer

Gun Lake Tribe

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