

In My Opinion

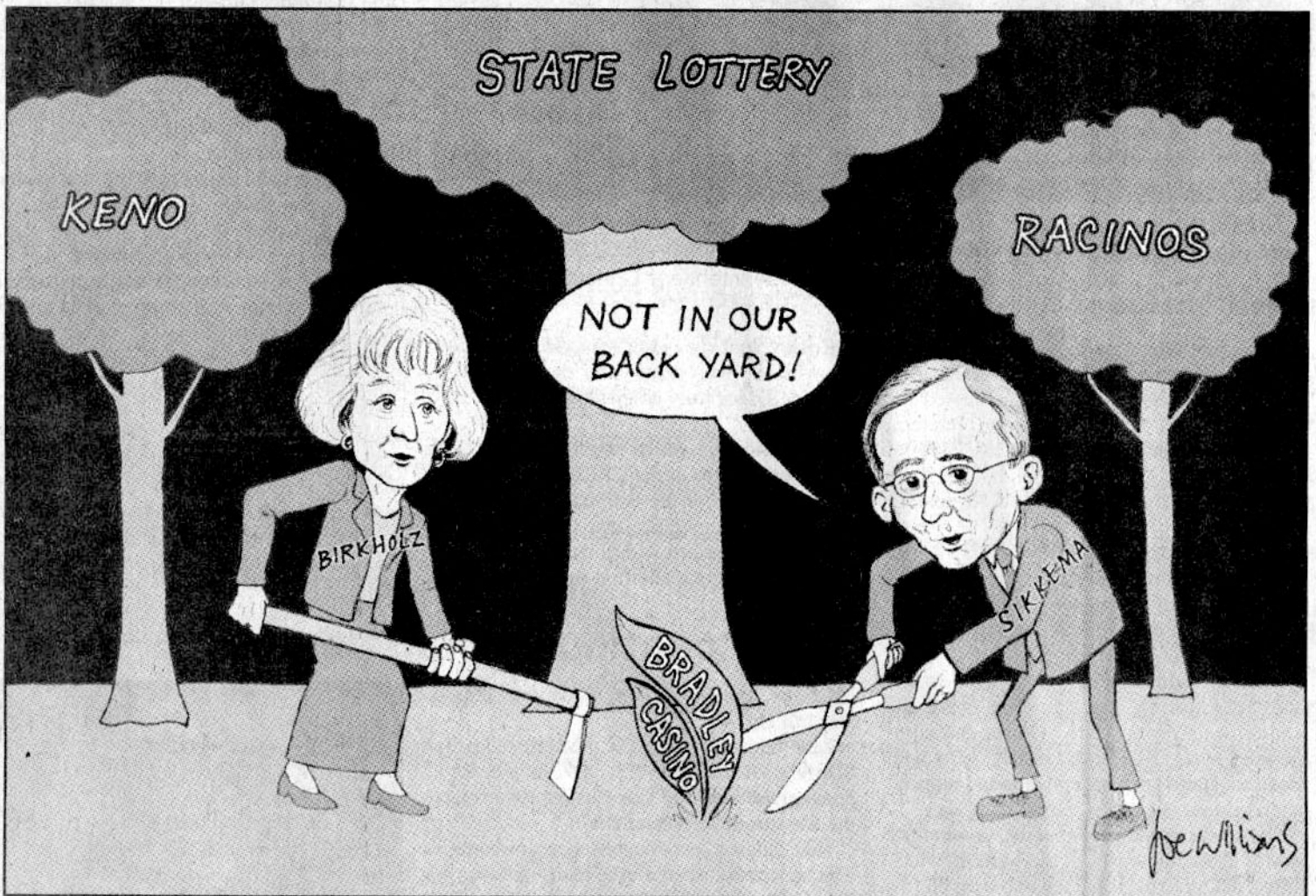
Anti-casino vote cheap grandstanding

The Michigan Legislature has shown us a nasty habit lately of passing useless legislation and adopting irrelevant resolutions.

Consider Senator Patty Birkholz's proposal to change the state bird from the robin to the Kirtland warbler and her idea to force school children to say the Pledge of Allegiance every morning. Consider none of this legislation will do much to improve the quality of our lives or deal with the economic problems this state has suffered over the last few years, but Birkholz beamed as she introduced and shepherded her proposals through the legislature. It was good theater, good politics, but ineffective and unworkable public policy.

the compact intentionally to Governor Grandholm putting her administration on the hot seat. Because the Pottawatomis are federally recognized, in the end they probably will get their casino, regardless of what Ms. Birkholz or Mr. Sikkema think. Given that likelihood, it's a matter of, if you can't stop them, try to negotiate so you can have some semblance of control over the situation. Right now the state and Grand Rapids, because of their short-sightedness and arrogance, appear to be headed toward getting nothing from the deal.

The Gun Lake Chamber of Commerce, Allegan chamber, Barry County chamber, Wayland chamber and many other organizations in



The latest example came Dec. 8. In a surprise sneak attack the Senate resolution was proposed and adopted by Birkholz, Majority Leader Ken Sikkema and colleagues to rescind support for the proposed Gun Lake casino. The major media markets swallowed the bait and promoted the notion this resolution somehow jeopardizes the Gun Lake Band of Pottawatomis' plans to build a casino in Bradley, just a few miles west of the Barry County line.

To me it appears Sikkema and Birkholz are playing to a select audience, more importantly to the very wealthy house of DeVos in Grand Rapids. In case you didn't realize it, one of the strongest opponents of a Gun Lake casino is former Michigan Republican Party Chairwoman Betsy De Vos, who has a lot of clout and a lot of money in West Michigan politics.

Ms. DeVos has claimed for some time a casino in Gun Lake will have negative impact, both economically and morally. There is a grain of truth in her assertions. A Gun Lake casino indeed could divert tourist and entertainment dollars away from downtown Grand Rapids, home of the Amway Grand Center, DeVos Hall and the VanAndel Arena.

And it's true that having a casino nearby could further aggravate problems for some gambling addicts.

However, Lansing lawmakers meanwhile made certain we have more "racinos" and Keno games in bars, not to mention a very aggressive Michigan Lottery program that is every bit as addictive to gamblers as any casino. Ms. Birkholz and Mr. Sikkema haven't lifted a finger to try to stop the spread of state-sponsored gambling since it was first approved three decades ago. Yet they tell us they oppose gambling in the case of a casino run by an American Indian tribe.

So it appears to me, all this posturing is the result of Grand Rapids and the state wanting us to spend our entertainment money with them rather than at Gun Lake. The moral issue here is bogus. So is the negative economic impact issue.

The state would do well instead to continue to work with the Gun Lake tribe to get the best deal, before they rush to judgment on the issue. Former Governor John Engler passed the responsibility to sign

the immediate area are showing a willingness to work with the tribe on their enterprise. This is a common sense approach to a proposal that very likely will happen at some time.

It's interesting the people who live closest to the proposed casino most favor it. Perhaps that's because it promises to provide jobs and a better local economy.

I really don't know if I'll personally ever use the casino when it opens at Gun Lake. But I'll do the opposite of our elected legislators. I won't throw obstacles in their way, making it more difficult for them in the process. I believe in competition and free trade under fair guidelines. I don't believe in keeping someone from opening a business simply because it might provide some competition.

This is yet another memo to the State Legislature: Please stop passing laws and adopting resolutions that mean little if anything to the health and welfare of Michigan residents. Start working on the real and tough issues, like the budget. Do what we elected you to do and stop the cheap grandstanding and become problem solvers.

Otherwise, we voters should start thinking about making some changes of our own in Lansing in the year 2006.

How about your resolutions for 2005?

There are just a few days left before the end of the year. You have probably promised yourself in the past to make some well-intentioned resolutions for change in your life, some worked, some didn't. Just remember as we enter the new year, you are fully responsible for everything you put in your mouth, or what comes out for that matter, what you do about your spending, and your general physical health. Look to the future and ask yourself as you travel through the new year, "How will the decision I make today impact the person I want to be at the end of 2005?"

Good luck and remember the journey counts as much as the destination.

— Fred Jacobs, vice president, J-Ad Graphics