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Columns

Gun Lakes Tribe Gaming: Fair Is Fair
Michigan Politics
By George Weeks



In its long quest for equal treatment in Lansing on gaming, the Kalamazoo-area Gun Lake Tribe, smallest of the state's 12 federally recognized tribes, has faced opposing firepower from some top guns of the Michigan GOP.

Among them: presumptive gubernatorial nominee Dick DeVos, who earlier signed on as an opponent but is not currently trumpeting the issue, and assorted GOP congressmen and senatorial hopefuls.

Democratic Governor Jennifer Granholm, wavering, as she tends to do on some controversial issues, reserves judgment on whether she'll sign a legislatively approved Gun Lake compact for a casino that Republican Governor John Engler (citing a personal conflict because some of his buddies were pushing it) declined to sign as he had for the other tribes.

Formally, the Gun Lake Tribe is the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians, named after a 1700s Great Lakes regional chief/war lord. His name meant a feared, powerful bird - although he was dubbed "bad bird" by the feds for fighting their illadvised removal efforts to relocate his people out west, the Trail of Tears.

(Though many sources spell the name of similar tribes "Potawatomi," Gun Lake uses the spelling "Pottawatomi.")

Gun Lake Chairman D.K. Sprague, a 62-year-old retired railroad worker who steered the 305member tribe to federal recognition, is hardly a powerful bird in the 21st century political process. Big bucks are against him.

But Sprague, in his low key way, is slogging around the state talking to newspaper editorial boards and others who will hear his pitch to counter arguments of such groups as "23 Is Enough" - dubbed to reflect combined number of Michigan's Indian and Detroit casinos.

Says Sprague, whom I interviewed last week at the Grand Traverse Resort near Traverse City (owned by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians): "Although 23 Is Enough is used to getting their way in west Michigan, they will not succeed in denying the tribe its sovereign rights

March 23, 2006

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which are protected by federal law and are not dependent on political contributions."

He's right. Facts are, as Granholm and ex-Engler administration officials say privately, under terms of federal recognition and gaming regulations, the horse is out of the barn; one way or another Gun Lakers will have a casino; and it makes sense for the state to negotiate a compact that produces revenue for the state and communities surrounding the casino, as existing casinos do, big time.

This is far from the biggest issue pending in Lansing. But it's worthy of note in the aftermath of the Washington scandal involving disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff, whose ripped-off clients included the Mount Pleasant-based Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe that paid him a reported \$14 million to use his levers in Congress and the Bush Administration to, among other things, fight the Gun Lake bid.

According to Sprague, the Saginaw tribe under current leadership, as well as other Michigan tribes with casinos, now support Gun Lake's bid.

As Chairman Frank Ettawageshik of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians told me Friday, there should be "a level playing field" in Lansing for Gun Lake, whose bid for a state compact is strongly endorsed by Kalamazoo Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Among vocal opponents of Gun Lake casino is U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra (R-Holland), who in 1993 succeeded in getting the "just and equitable treatment" that he said the Manistee-based Little River Band of Ottawa Indians deserved for federal recognition.

In 2002, Hoekstra told the *Grand Rapids Press* "we need to put up roadblocks" to Gun Lake's casino bid.

As of this writing, Hoekstra's office had no comment on how he views the Manistee band's casino, other than to say he's "consistently opposed" gambling. But when he testified in 1993 to add the Manistee band to those tribes that already had recognition - and casinos - he surely knew there was a casino around the Little River's bend.

Gun Lake's opponents say enough is enough.

I'd say fair is fair.

Sunshine on Iraq

Last week was Sunshine Week, touted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors and others to spotlight the right of the governed to know what those who govern are doing at all levels, whether local, state or federal.

Also last week, Hoekstra, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, was able to commend the Bush Administration for agreeing to do something he had been urging it to do, release millions of pages of documents, recordings, and other material captured in Iraq.

He said: "This is a bold decision in favor of openness that

NOTICE OF LAST DAY OF REGISTRATION FOR THE ELECTION TO BE HELD TUESDAY, MAY 2, 2006 To the Qualified Electors of

Hudson Township Mackinac Island Public Schools
 City of Mackinac Island Meran Township School
 Engadine Consolidated Schools St. Ignace Area Schools
 Les Cheneaux Community Schools

COUNTY OF MACKINAC, STATE OF MICHIGAN
 The Election is being held to vote on the following:
 School Board Candidates
 School Propositons
 City of Mackinac Island
 Mayor, Clerk, Treasurer, Assessor, Supervisor
 Township Propositons

SCHOOL PROPOSITIONS

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PUBLIC HEARING
Mackinac Straits
Hospital and Health Center

There will be a public hearing on the 2006-2007 Budget for Mackinac Straits Hospital and Health Center, March 27, 2006 at 4 p.m. at the Conference Room of the Mackinac County Airport, St. Ignace, MI. All interested parties are requested to attend.

Red Nelson, CEO

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will go a long way towards improving our understanding of prewar Iraq. By placing these documents online and allowing the public the opportunity to review them, we can cut years off the time it will take to gain knowledge from this potential treasure trove of information. This decision effectively places a collar on the bureaucracy and unleashes the power of the people and the Internet to help speed this process."

Nicely put - a collar on the bureaucracy. A good idea at all levels of government.

George Weeks recently retired after 22 years as political columnist for The Detroit News. His weekly Michigan Politics column is syndicated by Superior Features.

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