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## Gun Lake to casino foes: Stop your opposition

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Photo courtesy Gun Lake Tribe -- Pokagon Tribal Chairman John Miller and Vice Chairman John Bush of the Gun Lake Tribe of Pottawatomi Indians shook hands to signify the solidarity between the two tribes in the face of strenuous local opposition to Four Winds Casino Resort, a Pokagon enterprise that is planned for 147 acres of trust land in the southwestern Michigan town of New Buffalo.

BRADLEY, Mich. - The Gun Lake Tribe has sent a message to its anti-casino, anti-Indian opponents: Enough is enough.

Tribal leaders issued a statement June 6 asking MichGO and 23 is Enough, two of the myriad anti-casino groups that have emerged in recent years, to drop their lawsuit and stop funding opposition to the tribe's plan to build a casino and entertainment complex on 147 acres of trust land in Wayland Township.

The property is three miles away from the Bradley Indian Mission, which was the tribe's historic home and is part of the tribe's aboriginal lands.

In January, the federal court of appeals in Washington, D.C., tossed out an identical lawsuit against the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians, neighbors and cousins of the Gun Lake Tribe. The Pokagons broke ground June 3 for the development of Four Winds Casino Resort on 675 acres in the southwestern Michigan town of New Buffalo.

"It is wonderful to see our brothers and sisters to the south begin their economic and cultural recovery," said Gun Lake Tribal Chairman D.K. Sprague. "MichGO and 23 is Enough continue to delay the creation of thousands of good jobs, regional economic development, and the potential for millions of dollars in revenue sharing payments to local and state governments. In the meantime, the number of unemployed in our community continues to climb."

Sprague said the appeals court decision in the Pokagon case has set a firm precedent for Gun Lake, and is proof that gaming in the region is inevitable.

The Interior Department, the courts and the state support Gun Lake's proposal. The tribe is also championed by local residents, who formed a group called Friends of Gun Lake Indians and set up a Web site - [www.fogli.org](#) - to voice their support.

MichGO, which stands for "Michigan Gambling Opposition," filed a lawsuit a year ago challenging Interior's final approval of the tribe's land-into-trust application.

Calls made to MichGO President Todd Boorsma on June 16 were not returned.

Boorsma was quoted, however, in the Kalamazoo Gazette in response to an ad that Gun Lake had place in the paper's Sunday edition: "I thought it was good advertisement for me. I didn't have to pay for it, and my name is at the top part of it."

John Wernet, Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm's representative and legal counsel on Indian affairs, supported Indian gaming at the Four Winds groundbreaking. Eleven other tribes in the state have casinos.

"The benefits have not been limited simply to Indian communities, either, with jobs for all of the citizens of communities. There has been a great deal of spin-off economic development. Over time, revenues from these casino operations have allowed tribes to begin diversifying their economies and to begin moving into other kinds of economic activities" such as tourism and manufacturing, Wernet said.

Gun Lake estimates its casino development will create 1,800 direct jobs with an average annual compensation package of \$40,000, 3,100 indirect jobs and more than \$20 million per year in indirect purchase of goods and services from West Michigan businesses.

The tribe estimates that the one-year delay caused by MichGO's lawsuit has cost the state \$60 million in salaries and wages, \$53 million in spending for goods and services from local businesses, \$47 million in employee purchasing from local businesses, \$3.5 million to local governments and \$19 million in taxes and additional revenues.

"It's surprising that 23 Is Enough and MichGO have the audacity to gloat about delaying the Gun Lake Casino when what they're doing is keeping food off a lot of kitchen tables in West Michigan," Jason Palmer, the tribe's director of development, said.

Among the members of the two anti-casino groups are former President Gerald Ford; Richard M. DeVos, co-founder and former president of Amway Corp.; Peter F. Secchia, former U.S. ambassador to Italy, former vice chairman of the Republican National Committee and former CEO and chairman of the board of Universal Forest Products, which supplies Home Depot with wood; and Michigan's U.S. Rep. Peter Hoekstra.

Hoekstra received \$2,000 from indicted former Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff's firm after asking former Interior Secretary Gale Norton in December 2002 to extend a comment period on Gun Lake's environmental review for its land-into-trust application. "It's a shame that a small group of millionaires have put their own individual financial interests before the thousands of struggling West Michigan families who deserve a shot at economic opportunity," Palmer said.

Michigan's leading newspapers have endorsed the tribe's casino plans and its intention to enter a tribal-state gaming compact. The editorials reason that the tribe's casino is inevitable with or without a state compact, so it might as well be with a compact that will provide oversight agreements and shared revenues.

If the current appeal is tossed out of the court in Michigan, opponents have one more shot at appeal in the Washington, D.C., appellate court.

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"I would hope they don't do that, because it would be just another delaying tactic. The appellate court decision with the Pokagons is so strong, the handwriting is on the wall," said John Shagonaby, a tribal council member and CEO of MBPI Inc., the tribe's development arm.

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