

A frontal attack on Native self-determination

You don't have to support legalized gambling to be amazed and affronted at the action of the State Senate, which passed a law aimed at shutting down Native casinos before they even get off the ground.

First, and certainly true to its form for the last couple of years, the conservative leadership decided it was so steeped in wisdom that it had no need to consult with the citizenry on an important matter of public policy;

Second, we are angered, though not terribly surprised, that the same Legislature that is so willing to butcher the budget is equally willing to deprive non-profit social service agencies and tribes of the very tool by which some may hope to continue serving communities so recently deprived by lawmakers of vital services.

Finally, we feel this is not about gambling, per se. We recognize that even people in villages and towns across the state sometimes have serious and legitimate concerns about the potential impacts of gaming operations on their lives and social well-being. We honor such concerns. We feel with equal strength that this is a local option issue, that gambling, economic development and fiscal well-being and people's feelings about all of these subjects are sufficiently complex that they are best debated and decided by each community in its turn.

Especially in an era when so many funding sources are running dry, it is unfair, especially to small communities with few other options, to deprive them of yet another chance to be independent in function and spirit. There may be better ways to enrich the community than gambling than picking the pockets of visitors through games of chance. But there is no better way to decide gambling's pros and cons than village by village.