

Face off: the casino question

Welcome off-reservation casinos

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The state of Oregon is still in crisis mode when it comes to financing public education. The Oregon Legislature is having a special session to consider adding another 45 million dollars in excess lottery money to school budgets to help shore up K-12 education for the next year. But I may have a reasonable short-term solution that the state could take advantage of, and it wouldn't hurt the local economy either.

Indian tribal casinos are a big business, not only in Oregon, but nationwide as well. These cash cows rake in hundreds of millions of dollars annually, but none of that money goes to the state in taxes. Indian casinos on tribal lands are technically on federal property, so the state sees no direct benefit from their use.

But what if the state of Oregon were to go into the casino business or at least let a private entrepreneur build and run a casino operation off tribal land? If one (or more) is built in the Portland Metro Area, the state of Oregon could stand to make upwards of five hundred million dollars in the form of property taxes and corporate income taxes each year.

If this money gained is dedicated solely to education, the state will have solved a huge problem on how to fund this drain on state resources. Oregon could go a little farther and revamp its entire taxation system, but that is a subject for another day. In the meantime, our children could reap the benefits for a long time to come.

The only hang-up in this scenario is the obvious drain on the Oregon Lottery. The state introduced line games on its video poker terminals over the past winter and revenues are higher than expected. A casino (or casinos) would take away dollars from the lottery, but maybe the lottery could go in on the action that casinos would bring, maybe by allowing Oregon Lottery games to be played at off-tribal casino properties throughout the state.

I love this state and I really don't want it to become another Nevada, but the state of

Nevada realizes unbelievable income from gaming operations. With the proliferation of gambling in our country these days, why should the state of Oregon hold onto the moral high ground and not allow casinos to be built, not only in the Portland area, but throughout the state? In Oregon lessened its morals with the introduction of the lottery in 1984, and its hold on the citizens who like to gamble continues to this day.

Let the casinos become a reality, Oregon. Until our governing body gets off its ass and solves our real problems with school funding, this is an idea whose time has come. Let the games begin!



Photo illustration by Jeff Sorensen Clackamas Print

Laura Cameron

Commentary Editor

Do we really want our schools funded by someone's life-destroying addiction?

That, to me, is the question at the heart of the debate over Native American casinos being built off tribal lands. It is the main question because requests to build off tribal lands are always framed the same way: "We'll generate tax money for schools!"

Call me crazy, but I just don't like the idea of funding Oregon schools with gambling money. Even when I was in high school and watching program after program get slashed from the budget, I did not support the idea of opening casinos to pay for schools. Casino money is tainted money.

Consider these figures: according to a study by the National

Institute of Mental Health, 4.2 million Americans are addicted to gambling. Of those 4.2 million, percent have a yearly income of less than \$25,000. Combine that finding along with Dr. Rachel Vohlberg's study in Iowa that showed a doubling of problem gamblers within 50 miles of new casinos, and it becomes obvious that the burden of this "fix" on the school funding crisis would be unfairly shouldered by the poor. Not even by all the poor; mostly by those within easy driving distance of the casino.

Consider also that the American Insurance Institute estimates that 40 percent of white-collar crime has its roots in gambling. Their findings also indicate that insurance fraud alone related to gambling could exceed \$1 billion every year. This is a fix?

Gambling is, for most people, a socially responsible activity. Most gamblers are responsible. But the four to five percent of gamblers who become addicted create problems, not just for themselves, but for everyone involved. A single problem gambler can ruin an entire family. Area rates of divorce and bankruptcy increase wherever a casino is opened. It is estimated that 12 percent of compulsive gamblers become physically abusive, and many spouses admit to becoming verbally abusive to the gambler — and sometimes to their children — to cope with the stress brought on by their loved one's addiction.

Most Oregonians would never dream of regulating and taxing heroin or methamphetamine to pay for schools. We should not now fill our budget holes with money garnered from another debilitating addiction.

We should not help schools by hurting families.

No government without censors

Laura Cameron

Commentary Editor

Stupid people make my brain sad. If brains could cry, mine would be curled up in a corner, weeping like an emo kid writing poetry. Let me explain why.

There is a faction in America, small but vocal, that has been gaining steam in the last year or two. They are the ones who will brook absolutely no criticizing of the government; the ones who question the patriotism of every peace activist and blame every negative news story on the supposed "liberal media." I call these people "patriotoids."

Lately, the patriotoids have been focusing their ire on the press. With the civil war in Iraq, the Warren Plame leak investigation, warrantless wiretaps, the continued bungling of the Hurricane Katrina response, and Bush's plummeting popularity dominating the newswaves, they see the press's actions as unfairly, even maliciously attacking Bush and his buddies. They want them to lay off. "Stop being so critical!" they say. "The government's trying to protect us. They know what's best! Let them do their job!"

This is where my sad-brain syndrome comes in.

Since the founding of this country, the press has been the watchdog of the government. That's how the Founding Fathers intended it; it's why they included freedom of the press in the First Amendment. Thomas Jefferson (remember him? The guy who wrote the Declaration of Independence?) put it this way:

"No Government ought to be without censors, and where the press is free, no one ever will."

Yet there are the patriotoids, rising up in indignation and telling us that the White House and Capitol Hill should be considered untouchable. Talk about irony: in their "patriotic" fervor, they're proposing the exact opposite of what the Founding Fathers wanted!

Governments need watchdogs, because positions of power will always attract the greedy and corrupt. Remember Joe McCarthy! Should Edward R. Murrow have shut his trap and left McCarthy alone because he was trying to keep us safe? Remember Watergate! Should Bob Woodward and Leonard Bernstein have dropped the issue because it involved White House officials?

How is it "patriotic" to look the other way as corruption and cronyism destroy a government? Why this anathema to making sure our elected officials stay on the straight and narrow? Was not this country founded on the notion of holding the government responsible for its actions?

This is supposed to be the government of, by and for the people. In order to continue to be that government, the people have to know what the government is doing. To say otherwise is not disloyal; to inform the public is not unpatriotic. Indeed, I see it as the most patriotic thing a person can do.

I believe Murrow said it best: "We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of America dies with it."

Staff Editorial

Say "no" to gay marriage amendment: Constitution is no place for discrimination

Editors Note: The following is an editorial written on the behalf of and represent the majority opinion of The Clackamas Print's editorial staff.

In a time of his lowest approval ratings on record, President Bush has evoked the hot button issue of the 2004 election: gay marriage.

Whether or not this is merely a political move to arouse the Christian Right is still unknown, but what is known is that it's sure to start the mud slinging on both sides of the debate, and rightfully so. What is being talked about is the first time in history — with the exception of the 18 Amendment (prohibition), which became the only Amendment to be repealed — that the U.S. Constitution would be used to restrict the rights of citizens.

The moral dilemma of homosexuality can almost be separated from this issue, and arguing this point remains fruitless on both sides. What is to be debated though is the ethical problem sparked by talking of using the Constitution to discriminate against a specific minority.

Polls conducted recently have shown that approval for a constitutional amendment such as the one suggested is waning. In 1996 only about a quarter of Americans (27 percent) believed that same-sex marriage should be allowed. Now that number is closer to 39 percent.

This still indicates that a majority of Americans are not for same sex marriage. This would be nothing new for America however. The majority of citizens also did not support ending segregation, which is now hailed as a

great human rights victory.

This is why the argument is being made that this is a place where the government needs to prevent a tyranny of the majority. Allowing such to take place would be confirming the fears of our fathers when they founded our republic, and would be a step backwards for our society.

The most famous passage in the Declaration of Independence states that all men (which has now been expanded to include both genders) are given by their creator "certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The amendments made to the U.S. Constitution have reflected this, providing no restrictions (other than the aforementioned) which would infringe on these rights granted to all people.

This passage was used in the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court case Loving v. Virginia to successfully end restrictions against people of different races marrying, and overturned Virginia's Racial Integrity Act of 1924.

The chance of this sort of amendment passing at the federal level is small — a yes vote by two thirds of both chambers of Congress would be required, then three quarters of all States must ratify it for it to take affect — but it is important that even talk of such a radical move is discussed early on to prevent a snowball of support.

If this is merely a political flash-bomb however, we must be careful not to play into it and lose track of other issues. A healthy dose of skepticism is needed when observing any act of government, and this is no different.