

Study: Casino would reduce state gambling revenues

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

A study from ECONorthwest, a Portland consulting firm, says that a proposed private casino in Wood Village would cause such a reduction to the state's video lottery gaming revenue that it would represent an overall loss for public services, such as schools.

Backers of a private casino at the long-shuttered Multnomah Greyhound Park are proposing to designate 25 percent of its gambling revenue for distribution to schools, cities and other public services.

However, the ECONorthwest study estimates that the casino would bring in about \$480 million in annual revenue, earning about \$120 million to the state.

But, the report says, Oregon Lottery profits for schools and other programs would drop by about \$93 million a year, wiping out most if not all of the gain in state revenue.

Overall, the report also says, gaming would increase in the state. However, 65 cents on every dollar lost in a video lottery machine goes to public programs while only 25 cents on every dollar at the proposed private casino would go to public programs.

So it would take more than two times as much gambling at the private casino to create the same revenue for the state as the current Oregon Lottery.

Grand Ronde Tribal member Justin Martin, who is a lobbyist for the Oregon Tribal Gaming Alliance, told The Oregonian on June 5 that he hopes the ECONorthwest report shines light on one of the central is-

ssues of a potential ballot fight over the casino proposal.

"We wanted to get past what sounds good upfront," Martin said, "and get more to the meat of what is the fleecing of Oregonians just to pad someone's pockets."

Economist Robert Whelan said in the ECONorthwest report that lottery retailers within short driving distances of the nine Tribal casinos in Oregon have lower-than-average sales.

If the private Wood Village casino were built, about two-thirds of the state's 2,500 video lottery retailers would be within an hour's drive of a casino. Currently, less than 25 percent are that close to a casino.

The Wood Village casino's backers have until July 2 to gather 110,358 signatures of registered voters they need for a constitutional measure that would allow a private casino in Oregon.

They also need 82,769 signatures to designate the 25 percent of gambling revenue for public services.

Clairvest, a Toronto private equity investment firm that has invested in several casino proposals, has reported spending \$588,000 on the petition effort in Oregon.

Although the Wood Village backers say their private casino would create about 2,000 jobs in east Multnomah County, they do not take into account the negative effect it would have on employees of Tribal casinos, which offer steady, good-paying jobs in hard-hit rural Oregon outside of the Portland metropolitan area. ■

Includes information from The Oregonian.

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