

An Open Letter To the Governor and California Legislature from the Neighbors of Indian Casinos

RE: A Reasonable Tribal “Gambling Policy” for California

The passage of Proposition 1A has brought about a significant imbalance in California’s gambling policy. This imbalance is worsened because the tribal-state compacts negotiated by the Governor and approved by the Legislature failed to balance the rights of non-Indian citizens with the rights of tribes. This disregard creates havoc in communities that are directly affected by the rush to build Nevada-style casinos throughout the state.

Issues such as an equitable use of water resources between tribes and non-Indian citizens and the tragic loss of life which results from the lack of proper traffic access to tribal facilities, as well as other complex multi-jurisdictional issues regarding public health and safety, continue to be a focus of conflict and grievances. These and other issues raised by the presence of large commercial gambling operations in California’s communities deserve immediate legislative attention.

For a start, local government must be empowered to address land development and land use issues. Tribal governments must recognize the need to work with local governments to mitigate the impact of their casinos on the citizens of neighboring communities.

Tribes must reimburse the actual costs of services that they use from the local government, or cities and counties could begin to see budget deficits. Local communities do not want charitable contributions from tribes, but a commitment to bear the cost of development.

Moreover, a blanket authorization of the use of CalTrans funding to widen narrow country roads leading to tribal casinos perpetuates a gross injustice to local communities. Many of these casinos were built illegally without compacts years ago, in locations that were environmentally sensitive from the very beginning and state funds should not be used to encourage their expansion.

Tribes as well as local communities must make concessions to demonstrate good faith and a willingness to resolve conflicts. Why not ask the tribes to limit hours, and restrict development of unreasonable expansion for their locations? Isn’t that what any other development would be asked to do?

The truth is that only a few thousand members of federally-recognized tribes will profit from the massive tribal gambling expansion fueled by Proposition 1A and the tribal-state compacts. Millions of Californians -- and ten of thousands of Indians who do not belong to these tribes -- were left out of the process but will bear the consequences.

Tribal gambling may be here to stay, but the Governor and the Legislature owe the rest of California the commitment to address the severe problems created by the introduction of gambling enterprises outside the jurisdictional reach of state and local governments.

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