

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

Gov. Schwarzenegger, California is not for sale

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It is extremely discouraging that compacts under Gov. Schwarzenegger's watch were renegotiated with three Southern California gaming tribes. If the ratification of these compacts goes forward in January, it will allow 20,000 more slots in our state.

Las Vegas allows a maximum of only 3,000 slots in their largest casino.

This is just the beginning in California. There are another 57 tribes with tribal/state gaming compacts, of which the Santa Ynez Band is one.

The relationship between politicians and the Indian gaming industry has become so incestuous that fair representation is now a corrupted ideal for most of the citizens affected by these Indian casinos, and fearful news media continue to promote a forced silence upon communities.

Once and for all, expanded gaming and related issues of tribal expansion through the fee-to-trust process must be snatched out of the grip of politicians and thrown where it belongs — into federal court. Indian gaming has been sold to the public as a heated political and emotional issue, when it should be a legal one.

If legal reason reigned, tribal/state compacts in California would be called into question and thoroughly investigated. Communities are discovering that some of these tribes are not who they claim to be and have used flawed federal law, sympathy and historical guilt of a nation to build their mega-casinos while violating, and in most cases trumping, the constitutional rights of their neighbors.

If legal reason reigned, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 would be challenged before allowing any more casino expansions.

Gaming tribes are making unnecessary and excessive demands in their pursuit of gaming expansion while exploiting their \$23-billion industry and ancestral suffering as the guillotine for politicians dissenting from giving them what they want.

There is nothing new about money and politics being bedfellows, but throw tribal sovereignty into the mix and you have a non-transparent, federally protected money

machine funding changes in public policy concerning gaming issues. The largest political contributors in our state elections are now gaming tribes.

Any other government entity shrouding itself in such iron-fisted secrecy and allowed to bypass regulatory and constitutional laws, the way gaming tribes are allowed to do, would have the media furiously pounding at their door.

We get mostly silence from our media.

The Santa Ynez Band's tribal chairman, Vincent Armenta, recently stated, "We do play by the same rules."

Absolutely not true. This community would not be waging a costly legal battle over the tribe's expansion plans if the rules were the same concerning land held in federal trust. Tribal governments are allowed to skirt state laws, local taxation and regulatory laws including environmental laws and can and will override local governments.

Tribes are now asserting their tribal government-to-federal government relationship as illustrated in Armenta's statement in an area magazine, "The federal government needs to start enforcing the fact that tribes are sovereign governments and don't need these relationships with local governments."

Wake up, California!

The gaming tribes' plight no longer has anything to do with civil rights, justice or historical reparations, but rather with self-indulgent gaming expansion under the guise of self-determination — which is now nothing more than another special-interest lobby.

Representative democracy should include the will of local communities as exercised through elected officials. This has proven to be a delusional reality for our small community with instances of our own county officials breaching their fiduciary responsibility to the very people that elected them to office to appease the desires of 157 members of the Santa Ynez Band. The failed 6.9-acre "historic agreement" is just one example of this.

If Gov. Schwarzenegger feels so compelled to renegotiate state compacts with gaming tribes and continues to champion the Indian gaming cause, he and the rest of his advisors have a duty to this state to not only conduct thorough due diligence to know who they are dealing with, but to study what it's really costing our state when congressional testimony supports that for every dollar worth of casino profits and other social benefits — the highly touted more jobs — the state receives, it costs taxpayers at least \$3 in "cost-creating activities" such as crime, bankruptcies and other by-products of the gaming industry.

Indian gaming's promise of economic vitality for tribes is proving nationally to be a very

big red herring. Only the richest of the gaming tribes are benefiting, local communities are being destroyed and state and local self-governance hangs in the balance.

It is a nightmare marriage our state has walked into with the casino industry. The governor's quest for renegotiated compacts is misguided at best and the mirage of Indian gaming dollars being able to balance budget shortfalls is a dangerous, dead-end road.

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