

SANTA YNEZ VALLEY NEWS

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The Golden Calf of casino dollars

By Kathryn Bowen

As the county and community become increasingly enticed each passing day by the seduction of Chumash Casino dollars to solve their budgetary ills, it becomes important to know what we're really getting from a \$255 million a year 'sovereign enterprise' or more to the point, what it's costing.

Bottom line, the amount the Chumash tribe continually touts it dishes out in the press is a far cry from what they would pay if equally taxed like any other business. When factoring in that mitigation of the impacts of the Chumash Casino are currently well into the millions annually, these dollars become miniscule. Makes a couple of celebrated millions - pennies, really.

The inequitableness becomes even more objectionable when factoring retail sales tax, property tax, TOT's, and other taxes the tribe does not pay to the county.

The Chumash tribe has a largely untaxed and unregulated cash enterprise netting well over \$700,000 *a day* while the tribe still receives \$1.8 million annually in federal assistance for tribal housing, education, healthcare and tribal economic development.

That said, I can't say I'm real impressed with the Special Distribution Fund (SDF) figures that are thrown around in the local papers.

The tribe is not equally taxed because the tribe is a 'sovereign government'.

Herein lies the *real* issue but is the biggest Elephant in the Room I've ever seen.

A national debate must take place eventually on tribal issues because it is now only *wealthy* tribes - 5% of the entire Native American population - along with non-tribal entities like Trump, MGM, Harrah's and others keeping the entire pot of a \$23 billion Indian Gaming Industry while the majority of Native Americans continue to live in abject poverty.

These *privileged* tribes then begin to aggressively seek expansion through annexation to expand their 'sovereign enterprises' while claiming there is a *need* for the tribe to have this land taken into federal trust status.

The Santa Ynez Valley strongly opposes this kind of expansion by the Chumash Tribe and POLO and POSY continue to fight for a voice for this community in this matter in federal court.

This wasn't what Californian's voted for with the passage of Prop 1A.

This isn't envy either.

This is the exploitation of flawed federal law to benefit 154 people while the rest of the community are continually reminded that the tribes' rights are supreme and sovereign to theirs. The tribe has even requested a 'government-to-government' meeting with our Board of Supervisors to discuss our Community Plan.

The entire country was hoodwinked into the notion that it is justifiable to *promote* inequality in any form because of past persecution and that creating federal chaos was going to achieve anything just for the vast majority of Native American Tribes.

Salt on the wound becomes the fact that our own government continues to allow these *privileged* tribes to railroad small communities and other tribes while the government figures out what to do with the atrocious mess it has created.

Hundreds of cities and townships across the country have now become 'collateral damage' in a fight between sovereign state land and a tribes desire to rekindle *claims* of 'aboriginal territory' only to expand Indian gaming enterprises and other tribal tax-exempt businesses.

Tribal expansion is driven by greed not need and ultimately *supported* by the county, the state and the federal government because of their growing dependency on casino dollars.

This nightmare marriage we have walked into with the casino industry will bankrupt our cities, townships and states eventually whether through an economic siphon effect or in social costs, but in the meantime, doesn't it make sense to at least ponder the road we are traveling?

California is on the brink of walking in even further if the Legislature approves new compacts allowing the addition of 20,000 new slot machines in Southern California.

Just a reminder, the Chumash Tribe is one of the 61 tribes that entered into Tribal-State Gaming Compacts that are currently effective. Each of these tribes may operate up to *two gaming facilities on Indian lands* as lawfully allowed under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Beginning to connect the dots?

This is one conversation this nation needs to have.