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AS I SEE IT

by Alison Herson

Passing the Taste Test

California residents voted to allow expanded gambling (“gaming” as folks in the industry call it) on Native American Indian tribal lands. By a nearly 60% to 40% margin, voters decided it was time to offer the tribes a taste of self-sufficiency. Well, the taste has turned into a meal and all the tribes that have gone this route have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Take the Chumash Casino for example. The place has gone from a dusty out-of-the-way Bingo parlor, to a destination money machine, pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to each of its 153 tribal members, making them multi-millionaires.

As little as three years ago, it may have made sense to at least *consider* the tribe’s request for permission to incorporate a chunk of land at the junction of Highway 246 and 154 into its reservation for tribal member homes and maybe a small hotel and golf course. For many, the plan was already more than a simple *taste* of self-sufficiency, but in any case, the taste test should have ended there. The tribe is now influential and wealthy; it can and should compete with others equally at the same table.

The gift of a gambling monopoly to a few individuals because of past neglect and discrimination is a box with a pretty big bow. Perhaps it was a bit too generous as now they have a monopoly on a system of making money – oodles of money – that is banned to the rest of California’s populace. There’s simply no logical reason to allow them to annex anything else.