

Fighting a casino in Glendale

President Ruben Balderas, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation | Posted: Wednesday, September 10, 2014 12:00 am

The 2002 voter enactment of Prop 202, the 17 Tribes Initiative, was an enormous achievement for Arizona tribes. The new tribal-state gaming compacts that resulted provided tribes with a path to economic self-sufficiency while the State of Arizona achieved certainty that casinos would be limited in scope and number.

Furthermore, we agreed that casino gaming would be conducted on existing reservations and that no additional casinos would be built in the Valley beyond the seven that existed then. The limitations voters thought they were approving are now at risk because of the actions of one Tucson-area tribe, the Tohono O'odham Nation. Its plan to open a casino in Glendale violates the promises we made in good faith to Arizona voters to gain their support.

The proposed casino site encroaches on nearby neighborhoods and is across 91st Avenue from Raymond Kellis High School. A large part of the rationale limiting casino gaming to existing tribal lands was to ensure that casinos weren't located near schools, churches and residential areas.

Tohono O'odham participated with 16 other tribes in a campaign that promised limited, regulated gaming on traditional Indian lands. Now they say that the promises tribes made never really meant anything; they were just "campaign noise" and not to be taken seriously.

As a participant in the 2002 campaign, we strongly disagree with Tohono O'odham's characterization. Sixteen of the 17 tribes that supported Prop 202 have kept those commitments; it is only Tohono O'odham that has chosen to ignore them. Even as the 17 tribes funded and managed an initiative campaign promising no more casinos in the Valley, Tohono O'odham was secretly planning to do just that. Their leaders knew that if they were honest about their plans, neither the governor, other tribes nor the voters would ever agree. So they kept their plans for an eighth Valley casino secret, even as they participated in a campaign that pledged there would not be an eighth casino.

Not until early 2009, over five years after they purchased the Glendale property, did Tohono O'odham disclose its true intentions. Together with other tribes, we have opposed the proposed Glendale casino since it was announced. Unfortunately, we don't believe that the Glendale casino is the end of Tohono O'odham's ambitions for the Valley market. If they succeed with their plans in Glendale, legally nothing will prevent them from opening more casinos in the Valley.

Congress may now be our last resort to stop the Glendale casino. Currently, legislation (HR 1410 & S 2670) that would stop the casino awaits action in the Senate. Please thank Senators McCain and Flake for leading the Senate fight against the Glendale casino.

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