



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWTON

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September 14, 2011

Sen. Cynthia Creem
Rep. Ruth Balsler
Rep. Kay Khan
Rep. John J. Lawn
State House, Boston, MA 02133

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Dear Representative:

A number of years ago, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts (LWVMA) studied the issue of legalizing casino gambling. Members opposed the legalization of casino gambling, weighing the stimulus to increased employment, tourism and tax revenue against the demands for social and municipal services, police protection and the establishment of a state regulating body. LWVMA and local leagues across Massachusetts have continued to advocate against the establishment of casino gambling in Massachusetts.

The proposed casino gambling bill is very similar to one that was narrowly rejected a year ago; it differs only in that it will also allow for a slot parlor at a racetrack and it reserves one of the three casino licenses for a recognized Native American tribe. While the bill does attempt to address some of the many issues that have been raised in connection with casinos, it remains a highly questionable enterprise. Existing casinos in nearby states are losing money and laying off workers. We have no reliable data as to how many casinos the population can support and there is a real possibility that they will be overbuilt.

While the state undoubtedly stands to make money from the large licensing fees which are required in the bill, the amount of ongoing revenue should the casinos be built is very questionable. The League of Women Voters has long called for an independent analysis of the costs and benefits of casinos; we are disappointed that this has not been done.

We acknowledge that casinos, if they are built, will supply a number of much needed jobs and that those jobs cannot all be sent overseas. Massachusetts certainly has many people who are seeking work but are the workforces near where the casinos are likely to be built?

There are two federally recognized Native American tribes in Massachusetts and more who might seek recognition. As sovereign nations a tribe may do anything on its own land that is legal in the rest of state. At the moment tribes are restricted by a recent Supreme Court decision as to the amount of land that they can claim as tribal unless it was already under their control but that may change. If only one tribe has a license, it does not mean that other tribes might eventually be able to open casinos without needing to make any arrangements with the state.

These huge casinos come with thousands of parking spaces and thousands of vehicle trips per day, more pavement, more GHG emissions, more stormwater runoff into local wetlands and streams, loss of wildlife habitat and a very negative impact on sensitive areas in the proposed locations. Also, if land is granted tribal trust status, then any casinos built on this land will be exempted from current local, state and federal environmental laws.

The social problems of addictive gambling also remain and while the bill attempts to set aside funds for dealing with them, that again depends on having enough money to do so. The ethical question of whether the state should seek to sponsor a business which has proved to be harmful to many people and which shows no sign of offsetting benefits remains.

While acknowledging that this bill does contain some improvements over previous ones, the *League of Women Voters of Newton continues to oppose it. We urge you to vote no when the bill comes up for a vote.*

Very sincerely,

Anne Borg
Co-President, League of Women Voters of Newton