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The defeat of the referendum that would have permitted conversion of the DeJope bingo hall into a casino should be read carefully by all the players in the debate over the expansion of gambling in Dane County.

The proposal had broad support from political leaders like Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk, from local labor unions and from the Wisconsin State Journal. And proponents of a yes vote had more money - most of it donated by the Ho-Chunk Nation, which owns DeJope - than any campaign in the history of Dane County.

So why did the referendum fail by a margin of more than 2 to 1?

Those who argued for a yes vote could never muster a credible argument. Indian gaming is a reality in Wisconsin, and so it was impossible to claim that another casino was needed in order to provide the tribes with needed revenues. And the revenue-sharing agreements drawn up after negotiations between the Ho-Chunk Nation and the city and county never guaranteed sufficient new funding to offset the social costs associated with a casino. As Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz explained, the agreements were "not a windfall" and they were "not worth it."

While he was battered by casino supporters, Cieslewicz deserves high praise for standing up on the issue. He took a lot of unfair hits for doing his job, and the debate turned bitter as the vote approached.

Now that the votes are counted, we hope that Cieslewicz and leaders of the Ho-Chunk Nation will sit down and talk about how to renew relations.

Though the campaign waged on behalf of the casino proposal was characterized by excessive spending and misdirection, that was the fault of the high-priced public relations consultants who read Madison and Dane County exactly wrong.

In contrast to the too-slick media campaign, the leaders of the Ho-Chunk Nation generally acquitted themselves well during the referendum fight. They came across as thoughtful and committed, and we think that Madison and the Ho-Chunk Nation should look for ways to work together - not against one another - on projects that do not involve slot machines and card tables.

The voters have made it clear that they do not want a casino in Dane County. No one should misread the message and attempt to circumvent the will of the people.

No one should read the referendum defeat as an indication that voters here want anything less than good relations with the Ho-Chunk Nation, which has deep roots in the region and which continues to operate the DeJope bingo hall. That is a message that Cieslewicz and other casino foes need to deliver. And it is a message that we hope leaders of the Ho-Chunk Nation will embrace.

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