

The Newtown Bee



Search The Archives:

[Home](#)

[News](#)

[Services](#)

[Site](#)

[Free news!](#)

News, Events and Local Information for Newtown, Connecticut.

Editorial Inkdrops -

The State's Casino Fight: It's Not About People

Last week's decision by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in the federal Department of Interior to extend federal recognition to the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation has set off epidemic of hand-wringing by state and local officials who fear the move will ultimately erode principles of home rule that have shaped land use and development in Connecticut since... well, since European settlers first laid claim to Native American land.

With federal recognition, the Schaghticoques have won the right to negotiate a gaming compact with the state. They hope to follow a path blazed by two Southeastern Connecticut Tribes - the Mashantucket Pequots and the Mohegans, who run very successful gaming facilities - by developing a casino in western Connecticut. Danbury and Bridgeport have been mentioned as possible sites. But the state, through its attorney general, Richard Blumenthal, is appealing the BIA ruling, and if that fails he will take the matter up in federal courts. Even if the Schaghticoques prevail, there won't be a casino in western Connecticut for years.

There is a long list of reasons why the creation in Fairfield County of another gambling mecca would be a bad idea, not the least of which is the region's woefully inadequate system of highways where traffic already comes to a standstill every time hapless motorists fall victim to the dual hazards of speed and congestion. Add to that the 64,000 cars expected to be generated by a casino, and the region's progress will stall, both literally and figuratively. Whether the disadvantages outweigh the contributions a casino would make to the regional economy, job market, and the entertainment and cultural life of southwestern Connecticut is an open debate. Bridgeport officials, for example, say they would welcome a casino as a means to revitalize their city.

In the end, however, the success or failure of the Schaghticoques' bid for a casino will not depend on home rule, or traffic, or jobs, or crime, or any of the imperatives of morality and Native American heritage that have so richly infused this debate. It really is not about people and how it will affect them. It is about money - how much the State of Connecticut stands to lose or gain in the deal.

The State of Connecticut's appeal of the BIA ruling is motivated in large part by its own gambling addiction. The state is reluctant to upset the lucrative deal it currently has with the two existing

More Inside...

- ▶ More Questions Raised About Emission Program
- ▶ Council Budget Hearing Set For March 24
- ▶ Two Local Men Arrested On Heroin Charges
- ▶ What's Playing at the Town Hall?



ADDRESSI.
OF RIDGEFIELD



casinos in southeastern Connecticut. Under its compact with the Pequots and Mohegans, the state is guaranteed 25 percent of all slot machine revenue. This arrangement has funneled billions of dollars into the state treasury over the years. That deal is predicated on its exclusivity. Allowing a third casino in Connecticut would almost certainly force a renegotiation of the compact, reducing the state's cut. We suspect that once the Schaghticoke ante up after all the appeals play out, there will be a casino in western Connecticut somewhere at the far end of the traffic jam.

◀ Back | Copyright © 1999-2004 Bee Publishing Company | Top ▶