

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A 'Wonderful Life' for Anthony

We have a favorite old movie called "It's a Wonderful Life," where Jimmy Stewart plays George Bailey, an honest, well-intentioned man fighting a powerful, corrupt businessman named Mr. Potter. Potter ruthlessly uses his wealth to crush Bailey's honest business practices. It reminds us of Stan Fulton, owner of Sunland Park Racetrack and Casino, in his continuing campaign against jobs, growth, and honest competition.

Maybe we are as idealistic as George Bailey, but this issue seems to be one of black and white to us. Our elected leaders are supposed to represent the community, and that includes promoting jobs and growth. Yet several of them support the so-called "Committee to Protect Doña Ana County," an organization against the proliferation of gambling that — strangely enough — is financed by Stan Fulton.

The proposed casino promises 950 permanent jobs, hundreds of millions of dollars in spending, and a \$40 million endowment and a Foundation to support area projects to benefit the community each and every year. But now, Mr. Fulton has opened his checkbook, buying opposition to the project. Emboldened by the success of his conditional gifts to New Mexico State University, he now wants to "buy the votes" of the county commission. Even Mr. Potter was never that brazen.

Recently, a group of publicly minded individuals rallied to save close to 200 high-paying research jobs at White Sands. The county, city, business sector and NMSU came together to create a presentation that saved these valuable jobs. Even though the casino represents the largest private-sector economic development project in the county's history, it hasn't received the same support. Instead, Fulton has influenced some leaders and institutions to turn their backs on the county's neediest people, denying them the opportunity to build a better life.

In the movie, George Bailey wins out over Mr. Potter with the support of the community. They drew a line between right and wrong by rejecting Mr. Potter's manipulative, greedy methods. The people of Doña Ana County need to stand up too, and let the 'Mr. Potters' of Doña Ana County know that our community is not for sale.

SAL and BETTY GONZALES
(and the 11,000 other Anthony citizens that signed the petition for the casino)

GUEST COLUMN

If you don't want to repeat history, learn from it

BY RON GILLETT
The Las Cruces Bulletin

In the fall of 1996, Stan Fulton wrote a check for \$5 million to University of Nevada at Las Vegas for a world class Gaming Institute — a generous gesture. In 2001, he demanded that UNLV fire its president or else — an arrogant approach. Apparently, Mr. Fulton felt entitled to dictate who should be the university's president and who should not, based on his longstanding generosity with UNLV. Decision-makers at UNLV refused his demand to fire its president. Mr. Fulton got mad and took his philanthropic checkbook elsewhere. Maybe UNLV's loss is Doña Ana County's gain. I don't think so.

In August 2004, the Pueblo of Jemez unveiled its plan to build a casino in Anthony, N.M. Within a week, Stan Fulton changed his will from a bona fide gift for New Mexico State University to a bargain. In a quid pro quo bargain he would "give" half of the Sunland Park Racetrack & Casino to NMSU, if the University would help protect his lucrative monopoly. He took NMSU hostage and called it charity. Later, at the county commission meeting, he called it "black mail" and "good business."

On Sept. 27, the Pueblo of Jemez unveiled the details of its commitment for a "no strings attached" community foundation and endowment that was promised in the Intergovernmental Agreement with Doña Ana County approved in December 2004.

Mr. Fulton came to town to read his letter offering to buy the county commission's opposition to the Jemez/Anthony Casino. Fortunately, the chairman of the county commission vigorously disagreed with Mr. Fulton's premise that the commission was for sale. Fortunately, some found Mr. Fulton's manner, accusation and offer offensive. Unfortunately, others did not.

Some think the issue is to simply pick the best deal for the county. Clearly, the Jemez Pueblo proposal is better public policy. It provides a lot of desperately needed jobs, more money and good intentions, pure and simple.

- 950 jobs with health care insurance for employees and their families
- A \$28 million payroll
- \$32 million for the purchase of goods

and services

- \$540,000 a year "impact payment" to the county in the Intergovernmental Agreement and \$650,000 in added property taxes
- Millions for worker training to hire Doña Ana County residents
- A "best practices" problem gaming program
- A \$40 million endowment designed as a permanent fund, in addition to \$4 million a year foundation supporting scholarships, schools, recreation and other community priorities. All amounts are 2005 purchasing power dollars, adjusted for inflation.

The new casino will vastly improve Southern Doña Ana County and the Pueblo of Jemez. As an area property owner, I expect property values to increase. Since the new casino will have minimal impact on Sunland Park racetrack, one should ask: What is it Mr. Fulton really wants to buy?

I am pro-Jemez/Anthony casino but I am even more pro-good government.

Even if Mr. Fulton matched the economic benefits of the Jemez Anthony casino dollar for dollar — which he did not — the important issue is who is going to run our county?

If Mr. Fulton prevails today in stopping the Jemez/Anthony Casino, who will he want to fire tomorrow? What else will he demand? The county would have no choice but to join NMSU as a hostage and to be "on-call" to placate his ransom demands.

Alternatively, the county could say "no thank you, Mr. Fulton, we aren't interested in quid pro quo bargains with strings attached." Give us a real gift because you have already financially benefited from doing business in our county, and let the competition have a chance. We think two casinos are better than one. The county would then prosper with its integrity in tact as has UNLV.

This is unlikely since Mr. Fulton is so accustomed to "my way or the highway" tactics that he actually named his company "My Way Holdings." If the county commissioners give into him now, we should change the name of the county from Doña Ana County, to "My Way County" in recognition of Mr. Fulton's undue influence and questionable business ethics.

Ron Gillett is the owner of Dos Lagos Golf Club in Anthony, N.M.