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COUNTY COMMISSION APPROVES CASINO AGREEMENT

The Doña Ana County Commission approved an agreement worth \$540,000 annually between the county and the Pueblo of Jemez and developers Circle P Investments during their regular commission meeting on Wednesday, December 14. This Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) defines the responsibilities of the Pueblo and the developers, and specifies what the casino will bring to the community. The approved agreement provides millions of dollars to the county, and locks in promised benefits such as employee health care and training.

Approval comes on the heels of the results of a scientific telephone survey announced late Tuesday, December 13, which showed 74 percent of Anthony citizens support the casino, along with 58 percent of the area residents. The poll, conducted by Sanderoff Research and Polling, Inc., also found that 63 percent of Anthony residents would like to work at the casino. In addition, 11,054 Doña Ana County residents have signed a petition in support of the project. The poll recorded a sample size of 500 at a 95% confidence level, providing a maximum margin of error of approximately $\pm 4.6\%$.

The Agreement approved by the commission memorializes the local hiring preference, the "Buy Doña Ana County" goods and services promise, the Mesilla Valley products show case commitment, and an information desk to direct Casino patrons to local restaurants, hotels, shops and tourist attractions. The Agreement provides for additional police, fire, ambulance and other emergency services, which will improve the health, safety and welfare of the entire community

Under the approved Intergovernmental Agreement, the developers have agreed to:

- Provide \$185,000 for improvements and equipment to the Anthony fire station, \$100,000 per year for operating costs and equipment for the Anthony Fire Department initially, growing to \$200,000 per year once the permanent casino has been in operation for a year.
- Initially pay \$90,000 per year for Emergency Medical Service (EMS) costs prior to the opening the permanent casino, and \$160,000 annually beginning six months after the permanent casino is built. The casino will also provide a garage for an ambulance and a clinic for the EMS staff at the casino site.
- Provide salaries and benefits for two full-time sheriff's deputies,
- Pay \$250 per police call to the casino or casino related event,
- Pay \$10,000 annually for one police car's depreciation.
- Invest \$1 million in worker training, with a local hiring preference.
- Provide sick leave, life insurance, paid annual leave, dental insurance, and pay 100 percent of medical insurance costs for employees. Establish employee grievance procedures, unemployment insurance and worker's compensation benefits.

- Institute a ‘Buy Doña Ana County’ program for \$30 million a year in local goods and services purchases, with Mesilla Valley products on casino restaurant menus and in the gift shop.
- Promote local restaurants, hotels, and area tourist attractions at the Casino’s information kiosk.
- Refrain from offering food and beverages at excessively discounted prices, except during special promotional events.
- Promise not to build a gas station on tax-exempt land for 10 years. Afterwards, if a station is built, the casino must sell at a price reflecting fair market value.
- Sell cigarettes only at fair market value.
- Establish a program for the assessment and identification of ‘problem gamblers’. Provide professional counseling services for gambling addiction for county residents. Persons identified as ‘problem gamblers’ will not be allowed in the casino. The Anthony community and the county will receive an annual report on the number of people treated and the number of ‘problem gamblers’ banned.

This IGA demonstrates good faith and a true commitment on the part of the Pueblo and the developers to create a casino that is a beneficial member of the community. The Pueblo and the developer have designed the casino project in a way that will benefit everybody, says one project spokesperson.

The proposed casino from the Pueblo of Jemez and the developers means an enormous positive economic impact on Anthony and the surrounding area. Once approved, the \$55 million construction project will bring approximately 570 construction-related jobs to the area, with \$16 million in construction payroll. Upon completion, the casino will require approximately 950 employees. These workers will have good-paying jobs with benefits and healthcare. The annual payroll will be in excess of \$28 million, money that will be spent within the community by the employees. The casino will spend approximately \$30 million annually on local purchases.

The casino will also bring tourism and entertainment options to the area, which studies have shown are grossly underserved by the current casino gaming entertainment industry. For example, within 50 miles of Albuquerque, there is a population of 786,000 supporting five casinos and one racetrack/casino with a total of 7,250 slot machines. However, the greater El Paso/Juarez area has a population of approximately 2.2 million people with only about 700 slot machines. The casino will be built close to the Anthony exit on Interstate 10, where over 35,000 vehicles pass daily.

The developers have described the proposed casino as a great economic opportunity for everyone involved, making it a true ‘win-win-win’ situation for Anthony, the Jemez Pueblo, and the entire area.

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