

A seat at the table

By Paul S. Chinana
and Gerald Peters

As the developers of the Jemez/Anthony Casino, we are willing to address real issues and develop plans to mitigate problems. We base our decisions on facts. We say what we mean and we do what we say. Much of what we have been working on is in the proposed intergovernmental agreement with Doña Ana County.

We recognize that Doña Ana County has a higher than average unemployment rate and ranks second among New Mexico counties for people receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a form of welfare. Doña Ana County also ranks sixth highest statewide for residents receiving food stamps and is home to a large number of Medicaid recipients.

We agree that the area has too much poverty; however, we believe that the best anti-poverty program is a good job. The Jemez/Anthony Casino project offers 950 of them, with health care and other benefits.

During the controversy a few years ago involving whether the Speaking Rock Casino near El Paso should remain open, the judge asked the comptroller of the State of Texas to provide an economic impact analysis of the casino. The study, as close to sworn testimony as you can get outside a courtroom, concluded:

"Closing the casino would result in a loss of sales," and sales tax, "resulting from the payroll of the casino's employees ..."

"Closing the casino would result in a loss of nearly 2,200 jobs."

"The decline in employment ... would result in a personal income loss of approximately \$55 million in the region."

Anyone claiming that casinos located on a state line don't generate new economic activity is committing public perjury.

Furthermore, Indian casinos do not cause socioeconomic problems; people cause socioeconomic problems. The Harvard Study on Indian Gaming backs up that statement with empirical data.

The Harvard Study notes that a

rigorous statistical examination by the National Gambling Impact Study Commission, for example, examined data on 32 indicators of socioeconomic health for 100 communities over 16 years. It showed substantial gains and no harm when comparing communities before and after gaming ...

- A 12 percent decline in unemployment;
- A 13 percent decline in welfare;
- A 17 percent decline in income derived from unemployment insurance (paychecks replaced unemployment checks);
- No increases in social ills (divorce and bankruptcies);
- Decreases in some crimes identified.

Closer to home, the case study of El Paso's Speaking Rock Casino documents similar trends. Creating new jobs, increasing incomes, lowering the poverty, dropout and crime rates are benefits of a well-designed Indian casino with proper security forces.

Before Speaking Rock opened, half the community had no jobs; the high-school dropout rate was 70 percent, and the neighborhood had the highest

crime rate of any neighborhood in El Paso. Many homes lacked running water or electricity, and half of the people in the area were on welfare.

When Speaking Rock closed, unemployment had dropped to 2 percent — one of the lowest in El Paso. The high school dropout rate was dramatically reduced. Based on police reports at the time, the neighborhood had achieved the lowest crime rate of any neighborhood in the city. Stucco homes were being built, and the number of people on welfare had nearly vanished.

We looked even closer to home to examine the potential for increased DWIs if a casino is operating in the neighborhood. The DWI arrests are lower near the local racino in Sunland Park than they are for Las Cruces, when adjusted and measured on a per capita basis. The same is true when comparing domestic violence on an incidence per 1000 residents.

We respect the opinions of those who oppose gambling on moral grounds. We respect the opinions of those who just plain don't like card games and slot machines, if they are

blunt enough to say so. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, but no one should be allowed to fabricate facts or slide by with unsubstantiated statements.

We are concerned about the 1 to 2 percent of the population who are at risk of developing a gambling addiction.

We want to work with knowledgeable citizens to develop, explore and implement innovative "best practices" to address the problem. In addition, we intend to support groups who are involved in state-of-the-art research and treatment. These commitments are part of our Intergovernmental Agreement.

We are offering people who genuinely care about this issue a seat at the table and an opportunity to truly make a difference. We don't think this has been done before, and we are optimistic about its potential. Pull up a chair.

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