

Senator Luchini & Senator Schneck & members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee, thank you for allowing me a few minutes to make remarks in opposition to this ill conceived bill LD 1144, An Act to Authorize Tribal Gaming

My name is John Williams and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce, located in Oxford County and covering 13 towns with over 350 business members.

I'll get right to the point: I've testified here before in opposition to other Casino related bills and it's important that your committee knows that the citizens and the businesses of the Oxford Hills area, and the Board of Directors for the Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce are collectively in opposition to the operation of any casino or gaming facility that could potentially impact, negatively, the operation of the Oxford Casino Hotel & Event Center in Oxford, Maine, because in short it could significantly damage the local economy and reverse any sustaining economic growth...

The Oxford Casino opened six years ago and currently operates 963 slot machines, 30 table games, has recently opened a 107 room hotel, currently has 3 dining establishments and has just opened a new event center that can seat more than 300. In and of itself that is impressive and within the first two years of operation a Hampton Hotel was built directly across the street from the Casino, along with a number of other established businesses attracted by the visitor traffic that pours into the Casino off of route 26 in Oxford.(Applebees, Roopers Beverage & Redemption Center, Oxbow Brew Pub, Manufactured Housing, etc.)

Subsequently all of the above has helped create, sustain, maintain and grow a workforce of over 450 employees at the Casino, with the majority earning full benefits. And the majority of employees come from Oxford County-nearly 220, and Androscoggin County-over 120...

All of this has been critically important to attracting new business and seeing sustainable economic growth in an area and region, specifically Oxford County, that had for many, many years been in an economic malaise with the highest unemployment in the state. There is no question that the Oxford Casino Hotel & Event Center has been a significant contributor to improving the outlook and the prospects for continued growth in rural Maine.

Why then would there be any reason for legislation that could potentially devastate this economic base and engine in the western part of the state..there is language in the bill itself that threatens to do this including: 1) removing the 100 mile requirement and dropping it to 50 miles, meaning that we could have another casino built on our doorstep...2) the fact that the location of the Casino is not limited to tribal reservation land or any land owned by the four tribes, but also land in unorganized territories of the state(45%)..

3) and perhaps most damaging, land in any municipality that is approved by a municipal referendum or by vote of the town's legislative body.

4) Add to that that this bill would not require the tribal entity to pay license application fees or the license fee itself..5) it would be exempt from the current cascade requirements placed on the existing casinos in Oxford and Bangor..6) and it would not have to comply with the 48% tax rate on slots, dropping that rate to 25%.. 7) and finally, one of the most troubling components of this bill is that unlike the Oxford & Bangor Casinos, which had to be approved by statewide referendums, no statewide vote would be required to approve the tribal casino...

The Oxford Hills Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors unanimously endorsed this project from the outset because they could see the opportunities that a facility of this type would create and how it would ultimately enhance economic development in the region for years to come and we are beginning to see this come to fruition, but this bill in its current form, could potentially reverse that.

This is a business in an area that still has great need, and can ill afford any reduction in its production of revenue, which of course would also mean a loss of jobs and certainly diminishing development opportunities if the casino's overall performance is affected.

The Oxford Casino has been a tremendous asset to the 13 communities of the greater Oxford Hills, no question about it, and that has certainly been the case with all of Oxford County...with continued support for local programs and charities, representation on the Chamber's Board of Directors, a catalyst for attracting and introducing new visitors to the western Maine region, and a willingness to work with and contribute to programs the Chamber facilitates . We couldn't ask for a better partner.

I really hope you'll take this into consideration when considering the potential residual effect a bill like this could have on the communities and the region of the state that we represent.

Sincerely,

John Williams
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director
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