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The Not Here Please News

The Newsletter of Citizens Against Reservation Shopping
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Casino developer funnels money, threatens opponent

You might have read in *The Columbian* that Cowlitz casino developer David Barnett's behavior has been raising questions about his business practices. He is the driving force behind the proposed casino-resort and over seven years would split 24 percent of the net revenues with his co-developer, the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut, for managing and operating the casino. It would mean tens of millions of dollars in his pocket, as well as the Mohegans'.

On Feb. 22, *The Columbian* reported that Barnett, his wife and two companies, all using the same Seattle address, had contributed \$100,000 in October to the Progressive Majority, a political action committee out of Washington, D.C. This occurred "at roughly the same time the group was spending more than \$86,000, primarily on negative mailers, to defeat [Republican Tom] Mielke and help elect Democrat Steve Stuart, who won by a narrow margin."

Barnett told the newspaper that he did not contribute directly or through Progressive Majority to Stuart's campaign. But it is exceedingly difficult to come up with another reason why a D.C.-based PAC would take such a strong interest in a county commission race in southwest Washington. *The Columbian* reported that, "Last year, Progressive Majority contributed \$65,650.39 directly to Washington candidates and committees. Stuart's campaign, however, was one of only two that received the additional benefit of so-called independent expenditures, or money spent on a candidate's behalf."

The independent expenditure in Stuart's case was \$86,000. The PAC also made what *The Columbian* called "a relatively small independent expenditure on behalf of the re-election of King County Executive Ron Sims ..."

Casino opponents have been concerned all along about the effects of having a casino as the area's largest employer and best-funded political interest. Now, even before the Department of the Interior has determined whether Clark County land qualifies as Indian land, the casino's developer appears to be trying to buy a county commission seat. What's next?

But deceptive campaign contributions are not the end of Barnett's troubles.

On Feb. 24, Clark County District Court issued a restraining order prohibiting Barnett from contacting casino opponent Kamie Biehl or her children.

Biehl sought the order after she received a 6 a.m. phone call from Barnett in which he allegedly said that he had a Web site where he would post photographs that would embarrass her and would make accusations of her son. He was reportedly angry about articles that had been placed on the Web site of Stand Up For Clark County Citizens, a casino opposition group Biehl founded. She stepped down as the group's leader later that day.

It is well known among casino opponents that speaking out against Barnett's project can draw threats. After the Feb. 16 public meeting in Vancouver, *The Oregonian* reported that Tom Mielke, a former state legislator, "accused a tribal leader of threatening him and other lawmakers in Olympia."

Barnett has kept a low profile over the past couple of weeks, even canceling a scheduled appearance at the March 1 Cowlitz Casino Forum.

Your voice matters

If you think regular citizens have no say in whether a Cowlitz casino is built at the La Center interchange, think again.

When James Cason of the U.S. Interior Department (DOI) was in Vancouver for public meetings in February, he emphasized the importance of community input. In testimony March 15 before the U.S. House Resources Committee, he gave an example of community sentiment affecting his decisions: He turned down the casino-related application of a California Tribe *"because of the steadfast local opposition."*

Cason, the primary decision-maker on the Cowlitz project, recognizes the polarizing effect this proposal is having on our community, and he told the House committee about it. He contrasted our situation with one in New Mexico, where a tribe whose reservation is in an area unsuitable for gaming sought and found a town elsewhere in the state that welcomed its casino proposal.

The take-home message is this: Your voice is important. Let your local, state and federal officials know how you feel about this proposed development by telephone, e-mail, fax or mail. Express your views in a letter to the editor of the newspaper. For contact information, see [our Web site](#).

Local leaders demand a voice

At last month's public meetings, Interior Department (DOI) officials told attendees that they take very seriously the concerns of local community leaders.

And many of ours have stood up to be counted. Their theme: Do away with the faulty restored lands opinion that was issued by the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC) on Nov. 23. (See our [Commentary on National Indian Gaming Commission restored lands opinion](#) and our Oct. 19 news release, ["Cowlitz Tribe Pursues Secret Strategy."](#))

In letters to the DOI, local officials have stated repeatedly what CARS and other opposition groups have been saying for months—that this opinion, which suggests the Cowlitz Tribe is eligible to offer casino gaming in Clark County, was reached in secrecy—without alerting affected jurisdictions or soliciting local input, and using a flawed process.

Recent letters asking the Secretary of the Interior to ignore the restored lands opinion were sent by:

- Board of Clark County Commissioners
- Vancouver City Manager Pat McDonnell
- Sen. Jim Honeyford, 15th District
- Sen. Craig Pridemore, 49th District
- Rep. Ed Orcutt, 18th District
- Sen. Joseph Zarelli, 18th District
- Rep. Bruce Chandler, 15th District
- Woodland Chamber of Commerce
- Sen. Don Benton, 17th District
- La Center City Council
- William Ganley, Councilmember, Battle Ground City Council
- Councilman John Burke, City of Woodland
- Councilman Darwin Rounds, City of Woodland
- Rep. Richard Curtis, 18th District
- Rep. Dan Newhouse, 15th District

Additionally, Washington Deputy Attorney General Robert Costello wrote regarding the same issue to NIGC General Counsel Penny Coleman. ([->read more](#))

La Center Council holds its ground

Despite significant pressure, including a letter sent by Cowlitz Chairman John Barnett to La Center residents, the La Center City Council decided March 8 not to make any decision on the memorandum of understanding (MOU) proposed by the Cowlitz Tribe until after the release of the Draft Environmental

Impact Statement (DEIS) on the proposed casino-resort. The DEIS is now expected between April 1 and 15.

Moreover, the council plans to order an updated version of a 2004 study that predicted major impacts on the city's financial health if a mega-casino were built nearby. In 2005, the city's four small cardrooms paid \$3.7 million in taxes to the city—most of the city's income. The tribal casino would be in direct competition with them.

For many reasons, La Center is doing the right thing by waiting. For one, as we learned from the Interior Department officials who visited Clark County last month, decision-makers in Washington, D.C., regard such agreements as signs of support from local communities. ([>>read more](#))

Cowlitz Casino Forum a study in contrasts

The March 1 Cowlitz Casino Forum, presented by the Greater Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and Identity Clark County, demonstrated the contrasting strategies of casino opponents and casino supporters.

Cowlitz Tribe member and Thurston County prosecutor Philip Harju repeatedly exhorted the audience not to trust the misinformation of the casino opponents. He stated again and again that opponents distort the facts, and he implied that the listeners should trust him instead. Harju presented no documents or evidence.

Craig Rowland, who spoke on behalf of CARS and runs the Web site www.keepvegasinvegas.com, offered a presentation peppered with official documents and citations of reliable sources. He encouraged people not simply to take his word—he told them where they could find the documents and read them for themselves. Rowland also provided written answers to additional Forum audience inquiries.

The approach to their presentations demonstrates the difference between the two camps.

If you would like to support our work financially, we welcome your assistance. We are a nonprofit organization—501(c)(4)—but contributions are not tax deductible.

CARS is a local citizens organization that is concerned about the practice of reservation shopping and is dedicated to keeping large-scale casino gambling out of southwestern Washington.

If you have not yet joined CARS as a member, we invite you to add your name to our membership list. We will then be able to alert you when action is needed, so you can make your voice heard.

Please forward this message to others you think would be interested.

If you would prefer not to receive our e-mails in the future, please let us know by sending an e-mail to Info@NotHerePlease.org.

Watch for updates on our Web site,

NotHerePlease.org.

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