



Gambling in Broward County and at Indian Reservations

June 21, 2005

Last November Florida voters approved referendums in Broward and Miami-Dade counties concerning slot machine gambling. If approved, slot machine gambling would be allowed at existing parimutual sites. In March Broward voters approved it, but it was rejected in Miami-Dade. Unfortunately, the legislature failed to pass the necessary regulations that would make slot machines a reality as Broward voters approved. The senate approved Las Vegas style slots for Broward's four parimutual sites, but the house refused to act.

The issue is more political than it is economic; the house and the governor oppose gambling. The issue is further complicated by the fact that there already is gambling in Florida, but it is limited to Indian reservations with bingo-style games. Last March the Seminole tribe petitioned to enter into a gambling compact with the state of Florida. Federal law allows tribes to have the same type of gambling allowed in the state. Governor Bush has promised to negotiate with the tribes in good faith. But he also stated, "I don't have any preconceived notions, other than my hope and objective would be to limit the expansion of gambling in our state."

From a strictly economic perspective, full Las Vegas style gambling in limited locations is good for Florida's economy. The fact of the matter is that there is already bingo-style gambling at Indian reservations in Hollywood, Tampa, and Immokalee. And the Indians have enjoyed great success with their casinos. Expanding the gaming to Las Vegas style systems would significantly increase business. Furthermore, voters in Broward approved gambling in their county. They have a right to expect that the legislature and governor will expeditiously enact the necessary regulatory system.

Again from an economic perspective casino gambling in Las Vegas, New Orleans, Biloxi, and Atlantic City all do excellent business and compete with hotels in Ft. Lauderdale for customers. Cuba and the Caribbean offer full casino

gambling and this too draw potential visitors from Florida. Casino style slot machine gambling will stimulate Broward County's economy. Unlike the family-oriented tourism that dominates central Florida, Broward County's tourism is more cosmopolitan in its positioning.

Broward county voters approved slot machine gambling, in part, because they believe that gambling will allow their economy to capture more visitors. And they are right. The gambling boats and Indian casinos prove that there is a large market niche which is not being served by existing venues.

This is Hank Fishkind for 90.7 FM, WMFE News.