

Glendale casino imperils state-tribal pact

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The Arizona Republic

About the economic effects of a new tribal-owned mega-casino adjacent to Glendale, we candidly see both good and bad.

The resort proposed by the Tohono O'odham Nation at 95th and Northern avenues will hurt some local Glendale businesses if built, and will sap Glendale of tax revenue. And it will take [casino](#)

market share from a sister tribe, the Gila River Indian Community. But, likely, it will enhance some nearby businesses.

And about the moral and cultural concerns of gambling houses rising in our communities, we acknowledge things have changed since the 2002 voter-approved ballot measure that ceded casino-gaming rights to Indian communities. While casinos still are limited to tribal lands, those tribal lands are much more within the urban landscape than they were eight years ago. The Valley's tribal casinos have become part of the entertainment landscape.

All that conceded, the U.S. Interior Department decision to allow 53.5 acres next to Glendale to be taken into trust - the first step toward building a casino - is a game changer. An enormous, perhaps irreversible, event.

Approval of the land becoming part of the Tohono O'odham trust is imminent. The proposal soon will be entered into the Federal Register and, following a 30-day comment period, the deal will be done unless

an interested party, such as the Gila River tribe, successfully sues to stop it.

The Glendale casino would crassly mock voter expectations in 2002 that no new casinos would be built in the urban Valley. On Nov. 5, 2002, voters entered into a pact with Arizona's [Native American](#)

tribes: In exchange for an exclusive right to conduct casino gaming, voters asked only that tribes be limited to the tenets of the state-tribe compacts, which set strict limits on the number of games and casinos that could be opened.

Had voters any indication that a virus, an exception for adding trust land that the Tohono O'odham exploited, lay buried in the language of the 2002 ballot proposition and would render their expectations null and void, it never would have passed.

The future for tribal gaming in Arizona darkens if the feds approve a Glendale casino for the Tohono O'odham. Tribal exclusivity will be in jeopardy.

It may be regardless. Given the mood at the

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Legislature as it struggles to make up lost revenue, tribal exclusivity is being re-examined. The argument to allow off-reservation casinos that pay much higher returns to the state will gain steam. (See the Tohono O'odham's response to this argument in today's Letters to the Editor).

The Tohono O'odham's stealth campaign for creating a new Valley casino out of trust-land fairy dust only bolsters those sentiments. The public commitment to its side of the 2002 agreement will be damaged.

The view will be that voters were tricked in 2002, and the political will to continue supporting tribal exclusivity will diminish.

And what argument can be raised against it? The mainstream moral objection to the spread of gambling has been breached. We have become comfortable with the casinos in our midst. As for a commitment to Prop. 202, why should voters value something the Tohono O'odham mock?

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