

Voice of the Rocky Mountain Empire

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ThePostEditorials

Colleges deserve gambling money

The Colorado Historical Society has a claim to a fraction of the new revenue, but the focus should be on community colleges.

It should come as no surprise that given the lousy economy and plummeting state revenues, lots of folks are casting a covetous eye toward one of the few new state revenue sources — gambling money.

We hope Colorado lawmakers take action to ensure the money goes where voters intended, and resist the temptation to earmark the money or fiddle with funding formulas.

The problem, as it were, began in November when voters overwhelmingly approved allowing the state's three gambling towns to raise betting limits to \$100 a hand and extend hours, which is expected to significantly boost the state's taxable take.

Amendment 50 spelled out where the new, additional tax money was to go: 78 percent to community colleges and 22 percent to gaming communities. It should be noted that the new money is distinct from the gambling taxes collected since Colorado voters approved gaming in 1990.

However, the devil has emerged in the details of divvying up the new revenue.

It gets very complicated very fast, but the original pot of money, the pre-Amendment 50 money, included a sizeable slice for historic preservation. While they will still get their percentage, a dispute has arisen between community college officials and historic preservation folks over the definition of additional tax revenues attributable to new betting limits and hours.

And they differ over the precise

calculation of who gets what slice of the pie.

House Bill 1272 was introduced in the state legislature this week to establish rules for how the amendment will work.

We think it fairly reflects the intent of Amendment 50 and will ensure that a lion's share of the new gambling money will go to shore up community colleges, which are seeing sizeable enrollment increases but getting less state money.

We also understand how difficult a position the Colorado Historical Society finds itself in. The society is a non-profit agency and a state institution that operates 12 historic sites and museums around the state. It is in the thick of trying to build a new Colorado History Museum, a project estimated at \$112 million.

With the state contemplating shutting down prisons and mental health facilities, prospects for funding are difficult, to say the least.

On top of that, gaming revenue, a prime source of money for preservation and the new museum, has decreased with the down economy. So we understand why historic preservation people might be looking to get a bigger slice of gambling money.

Regardless of how sympathetic the cause, state legislators ought to ensure the enabling legislation fairly apportions money to community colleges. Clearly, that is what voters intended when they approved extended gaming.

The Pueblo Chieftain

Your print and online news source for Southern Colorado

Friday, February 27, 2009

Clear intent

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By THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

February 27, 2009 02:48 am

COLORADO VOTERS expressed their clear intent to fund state community colleges when they passed Amendment 50 to expand casino gambling on the November ballot.

HB1272, implementing the voter-approved measure, was carried through the House by Rep. Tom Massey, R-Poncha Springs. The Senate sponsor, Sen. Abel Tapia, D-Pueblo, is scheduled to take the bill into the Education Committee next Wednesday.

As Amendment 50 dictates, HB1272 allocates 78 percent of the additional state revenue from expanded casino gambling in Cripple Creek, Central City and Black Hawk to community and junior colleges. The rest will go 10 percent to the three casino mountain towns and 12 percent to Gilpin and Teller counties.

The original beneficiaries of casino tax revenue will continue to get their shares of the pre-Amendment 50 revenue - 50 percent to the state general fund and 28 percent to the State Historical Society.

The increased revenue generated by Amendment 50 is projected to yield \$29 million for community colleges in 2010, rising annually to \$63 million by 2014. It's a great shot in the arm for all the two-year campuses, including Pueblo Community College, Otero Junior College, Lamar Community College, Trinidad State Junior College and the two-year associate degree programs that four-year Adams State College offers.

Since the voters' will is clear, legislators had better resist any temptation to use the additional Amendment 50 funding merely to replace current sources of the schools' funding. The people intend to boost the money going to community colleges.

Period.

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AURORA Sentinel

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Editorial: Future of local colleges trumps history these days

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By THE VOICE OF AURORA
The Aurora Sentinel

Published: Thursday, February 19, 2009 12:55 PM MST

It's sad that two noble and vital causes are taking sides against each other as state finances continue to unravel.

A compromise appears to have been struck for now between state historical supporters and backers of community colleges over the proceeds of Amendment 50, passed overwhelmingly by Colorado voters last year. That measure extends hours and gambling limits for state casinos with the caveat that new revenue created by the change go primarily to state community colleges. At the time of the election, community colleges were already hurting from shrinking revenues and swelling rolls.

Those, relatively, were the good old days.

With rising unemployment, keen competition for what little business expansion there is, and a needier-than-ever community, a well-funded Aurora Community College is more important than ever. That's absolutely not the case, officials say. Unlike public schools, the state doesn't write a check for every student enrolled. At times like these, extra enrolment is a financial burden on the college, not a boon because state funding has dwindled so seriously.

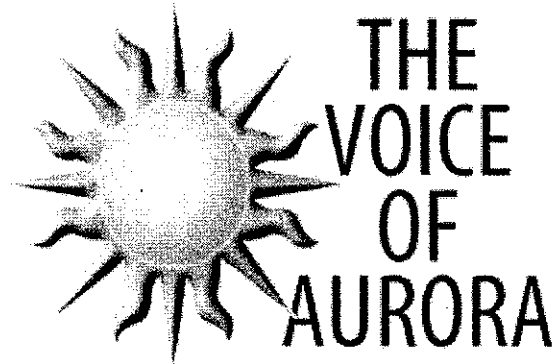
Now, more than ever, every dime local community colleges can get from Amendment 50 or any other source is pivotal. And it's never been more crucial for individuals to be able to return to school for new skills or learn critical job skills for the first time. And for the community, it's critical that the school be able to offer a wide range of programs, first to ensure that as many as possible are able to get work, and just as importantly, so that industries that choose to move or stay in Aurora are able to get trained workers to help keep the wheels on our shaky economy.

Certainly all of Colorado has benefited greatly by the casino industry and the hundreds of millions of dollars it's poured into important historical preservation projects.

But the state must get its priorities straight, and the community college system must be a priority at this time of extreme uncertainty in the economy and the workplace.

It's fortunate that both sides here worked out a compromise, but the formula and fairness of the best intentions of those who created and supported Amendment 50 weren't enough to ensure the best results for all concerned.

State lawmakers should consider a referendum to revisit the formula that now splits gaming tax proceeds among the state general fund, historical preservation and community colleges. Lawmakers need to create a stable and predictable distribution that acknowledges the benefits of historical preservation of the past, but one that recognizes how critical a properly funded community college system is to ensuring our future.



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February 13th, 2009

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Guest View - Amendment 50 funding must not be redirected

By Dr. Kerry Hart
Wednesday, February 11, 2009

During the summer and fall of 2008, I joined with my colleagues from community colleges across the state, business and nonprofit organizations and community leaders in support of Amendment 50, the statewide initiative that supported an increase in the limited stakes gambling in Black Hawk, Cripple Creek and Central City.

One of the most compelling reasons to support Amendment 50 was the fact that 78 percent of all new revenue would be invested in community, junior and district colleges. This was an opportunity to help tens of thousands of Coloradans who need the flexibility and affordability of a community college, as well as give a much-needed boost to the state's economic engine, without raising our taxes.

The importance of these institutions of higher learning cannot be underestimated, especially in a tough economy. More than half of our state's nurses are trained at community colleges along with 90 percent of our state's first responders. Community colleges also support much-needed economic development. For every dollar invested in community colleges, the community receives seven dollars in return.

These arguments were compelling enough for 59 percent of Colorado's voters to vote yes for Amendment 50. In fact, Amendment 50 was one of only two statewide initiatives to pass and received more than 1.2 million votes, more than any other statewide campaign. In Morgan County, 61 percent of the voters supported Amendment 50.

As an advocate of this initiative, I was asked many times if this funding would replace the current funding that these schools receive from the state. The answer we all gave over the six months of the campaign was "no." The reason is very simple; it is written very clearly in the ballot language that this funding is meant to supplement, not supplant, current funding and that community, district and junior colleges are to receive 78 percent of new gaming revenue, period.

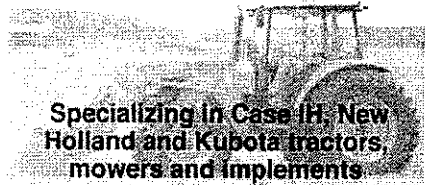
It is also made very clear in the ballot language that Amendment 50 does not reduce the amount of funding that is allocated to pre-Amendment 50 recipients; all will receive the same percentage of this revenue as they have in the past.

Colorado is facing many tough choices in what is a very tough economy. It is understandable that in these tough economic times the legislature would look hungrily at any new revenue stream and use it for what I am sure are worthwhile projects. But the voters approved Amendment 50 with the understanding that 78 percent of new gaming revenues would go to community colleges and would not be diverted to pay for new government buildings or to other causes.

This extra revenue will impact our community directly by allowing us to offer a stronger curriculum and continued educational advancement for current and potential students.

Currently the legislature is considering House Bill 1272, which is the enabling legislation of Amendment 50. By passing it, the legislature recognizes the will of the voters and will begin the implementation of Amendment 50.

— Dr. Kerry Hart is president of Morgan Community College.



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THE CHRONICLE-NEWS

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TSJC president speaks out about safe guarding Amendment 50

By MIKE GARRETT
The Chronicle-News

With a state Legislative vote expected Thursday in Denver to help safeguard Amendment 50 that voters approved last November, outgoing Trinidad State Junior College President Ruth Ann Woods has prepared a list of important talking points to give Legislators plenty of ammunition to ensure that the amendment is implemented and upheld to protect funding for state community colleges and higher education.

Woods key points are:

■ Fifty-nine percent or 1.2 million votes cast by Colorado voters supported Amendment 50 with and it passed in 57 of the state's 64 counties. Amendment 50 was one of only two state ballot initiatives to pass last November.

■ Rural areas in particular like Las Animas County passed the ballot measure to preserve and protect their community colleges. Las Animas County voters passed it with a 62 percent margin while Yuma County led the state with 72 percent approval.

■ All state community colleges offer workforce solutions to a deteriorating economy and point to their enrollments being up 12 percent this past semester. Career and tech, remedial, transfer opportunities and open access to the colleges are all selling points.

■ Woods noted that the state has a unique opportunity in allowing Amendment 50 funds to play a more inte-



Ruth Ann Woods

gral role in providing Colorado workforce solutions and improve other service and educational opportunities. While the state's gaming community used state historic preservation as its cause for successfully getting its ballot measure passed, Amendment 50 revenues will in turn substantially raise the state community college system from being one of the lowest funded in the U.S.

■ Implementing and assuring flexibility into Amendment 50 funding is crucial because of the state's need for increased educational opportunities. That promise can only occur if funding is not supplanted or siphoned off to other uses, Woods said. She pointed out that the state's CC system was assured by state Legislators before the vote that its funding would supplement, not supplant existing dollars.

■ State community colleges and higher education in general are facing state funding cuts under the anticipated huge state budget deficit. When state tax revenues start to increase again, community colleges

need assurance that they will receive their fair share of the higher education designated revenues.

■ The state community colleges need assurance they will receive 78 percent of the new revenues. Existing recipients like historical preservation and the colleges differ on their interpretations of how much the new dollars that existing recipients are to receive out of Amendment 50 funds.

In summary, Woods points to an Amendment 50 clause that clearly states that existing recipients will receive a share of annual, year-to-year, portion of the Amendment 50 dollars.

■ In addition to this "bonus payment," existing recipients are seeking a 6 percent annual compound growth for each future year. This provision is not in Amendment 50 and would otherwise cut into the colleges 78 percent of new revenues, which A50 voters were told would go directly to the CCs.

■ Another concern is that Amendment 50 will wind up being mixed in with Senate Bill 08-206 that was passed last year to fund a new \$110 million history museum and was passed without any thought for A50.

■ The state's current issue is that gaming tax revenues are lower than expected due to the bad economy and result in less revenues to now build the history museum. "That is entirely a separate issue and has nothing to do with A50," concluded Woods.

Monday, February 9, 2009

Legislature needs to honor Amendment 50

In November 2008, Colorado voters approved Amendment 50. The vote expanded the betting limit and hours of operation for casinos in communities that already have limited stakes gaming. The amendment expands betting to a maximum of \$100.

In exchange, a large percentage of the anticipated revenue is to go to schools and community colleges.

While the Journal-Advocate does not fully support the idea of enticing residents to gamble as a way to help public education, we do feel the Legislature needs to follow the intent of the voters by making sure the funds that are supposed to be earmarked for community colleges stays that way.

Amendment 50 made it clear. . . . de on extended hours, and expanding gambling limits to \$100. It was clear that the lion's share, 78 percent, of the new revenue would go to community colleges. The remaining 22 percent would be reserved for gaming communities. Nowhere in the voter-approved measure was the historical society or any other agency considered; just community colleges and the gambling towns.

Also of note. This division of revenue does not impact the revenue generated by the standards set when gambling was first allowed in Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City. Revenue is already earmarked for Great Outdoors Colorado and other public funds. This expansion is designed to help community colleges, then the communities supporting gaming. In eastern Colorado, three community colleges may be impacted by Amendment 50. Like most all government agencies, public education is being impacted by the recession. The real question seems to be not if, but how badly.

If it is managed as the amendment was proposed, it is likely some of the money colleges expect to lose in our downward economy will be recapped. However, if the Legislature steers toward the Colorado Historical Society's belief that the Historical Society has a right to a percentage of this increase, i.e. expanded gambling revenue, then we can expect our community college system to get leaner and leaner. We can watch public education take a double whammy with the state withholding funds because of its shortfall, coupled with voters' wishes being disregarded, or the Legislature can follow the wording of the amendment as written. It is likely that with the state shortage, the best our colleges can hope for with Amendment 50 is a break-even point, but that is still better than cutting staff and programs vital to the community.

This is not the time to further keep residents away from the classroom and opportunities for advancement. We urge the Legislature to pay special attention to the intent and wording of the amendment when considering House Bill 1272. For some of you, your decision may be what helps your neighbor keep his teaching job, or his son or daughter in college.

In this column alone is the Journal-Advocate's opinion expressed.

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