

Sunday, October 05, 2008

## **AURORA SENTINEL**

Editorial: Amendment 50 is a good bet

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At a time when community colleges across the state, including Community College of Aurora, are struggling to keep up with more students and less money, Amendment 50 is a safe bet for the whole state.

The initiative would allow Colorado's gaming towns to decide whether casinos should expand hours, raise betting limits, or add new games, and then funnel the bulk of the increased revenue to state community colleges. Those communities where gambling is allowed could decide to make some, all or none of the changes.

No harm. No foul.

Gambling has been a huge boon to Colorado, virtually bringing back from the dead the historic towns of Cripple Creek, Central City and Black Hawk. The state's gaming industry has delivered hundreds of millions in state revenue and pumped even more tourism money into local and regional economies.

Now, almost 20 years since voters permitted gambling, it's time to make some changes to the system to allow it to thrive, and to allow all state residents to reap the benefits of the changes.

Amendment 50 would allow gambling towns to add games like roulette and craps and increase bet limits from \$5 to \$100, giving them the ability to expand their gaming offerings to compete with other gambling towns nationwide. The measure also allows local residents to decide whether to allow casinos to extend their hours beyond 2 a.m.

Even if the benefits of this measure didn't hit so close to home in Aurora, the initiative is a good idea to preserve the economic health of this important tourism industry.

But Aurora wins big with this ballot question because it would allow the state to collect more than \$60 million a year in additional revenue for community colleges statewide, millions of that going just to the Community College of Aurora each year.

These colleges are the lifeblood of local economic development and critical to Colorado's higher education system. A strong community college system acts as a magnet for all kinds of lucrative industries because they depend on them for training, retraining and helping develop skilled employees. Just as important, the

community college system is a vital bridge to four-year degrees for millions of students.

Here in Aurora, the college now partners with local school districts and provides a way for students to leave high school with much general baccalaureate coursework complete, speeding up a four-year degree and saving students thousands of dollars. The college is an integral part of Aurora that has been hit hard by deep and successive statewide cuts to higher education.

Amendment 50 won't fix all the problems that local community colleges face, but it's the best bet to come along in a long time.

Vote "yes" on Amendment 50.

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## OUR VIEW

# Vote yes on Amendment 50 to provide more funding for community colleges

In 1991, three Colorado cities opened their doors to legalized casino gambling. Those cities, Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City, had gained voter approval for the introduction of limited stakes gambling. Gambling limits of \$5 per bet were put into place, and the casinos could offer only slot machines, blackjack and poker.

Tax money collected from the operations went to preserve historic structures not only in those three cities, but across the state. This year, an unusual alliance has come forth to offer Amendment 50, which would allow residents of those three gambling towns to alter the rules they have worked under for the past 17 years. That alliance includes the casino operators, who want to be able to add more games such as craps and roulette and offer higher gambling limits, and the state's community colleges, which see an opportunity to replace funding that has been lost in the shuffle through the budget constraints put in place by the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights. If approved, the amendment

would allow the towns to increase the limit on bets to \$100 and give casinos expanded hours of operation.

And the community colleges? Under calculations from the state, they will add \$29 million in funding in the first year the new rules are in effect, with the funding increasing every year thereafter. While voters have consistently rejected expanding gambling to other communities in the state, this ballot measure should be approved because any expansion will be limited to Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City. Moreover, voters there will be empowered to make the final decisions on how to best regulate the operations within their town limits. The benefit to the community colleges will be great. Right now, they are often the place where the most hands-on technical education is taking place, and their graduates are filling many important roles in the work force.

Amendment 50 finds a way for a worthwhile state program to have its funding buttressed while taxing only those who want bigger thrills from Colorado's legalized casinos. It's worthy of support.

Gazette

## OPINION: A vote that helps us all

### Measure a 'godsend' to local colleges

September 2, 2008 - 6:43PM

The November election won't be easy for informed voters, as they will be asked to decide on some 20 ballot questions, ranging from elimination of discrimination in government to the definition of personhood. Among the simple decisions is Amendment 50. A "yes" vote would allow voters in Colorado's three gambling towns - Cripple Creek, Blackhawk, and Central City - to change some regulations that reduce gambling revenues.

Modifying those gaming restrictions would solve a major problem in Colorado's educational system, and one that's holding back Pikes Peak Community College - Colorado's second-largest community college. Colorado's 13 community colleges, including Pikes Peak, are the most poorly funded in the United States. Thankfully, the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights prevents the state Legislature from simply imposing new taxes to solve the dilemma. TABOR forces the state to: A. Live with having the least-funded community colleges in the United States, B. Ask taxpayers for new taxes, or C. Figure out a constructive and innovative way to increase funding. Amendment 50 is option "C," and it represents a fair and constructive way to get it done.

Coloradans voted in 1990 to allow limited stakes gambling in the above-mentioned historic towns, and it has raised millions for the State Historical Society and the counties and cities that host private casinos. But taxes on the gaming industry would generate considerably more money if casinos could stay open longer, offer more games, and if gamblers could bet more than \$5 at a time. Amendment 50 would allow voters in gambling towns to decide whether they wanted to raise stakes to up to \$100 for each bet - a reasonable adjustment for inflation, if nothing else. It would also allow local voters to lift or ease restrictions on casino hours, and would allow the addition of the games of roulette, craps or both.

If Amendment 50 passes, 78 percent of the new gaming revenues would go directly to community colleges. The remaining 12 percent of new revenues would continue funding entities already benefiting from casino gaming. The new money could not be raided by politicians wishing to pad the state's general fund. Based on state estimates, easing the regulations would generate at least \$18 million in new revenue for the state's community colleges. More optimistic estimates put the amount up to \$80 million. "This would be a godsend," said Dr. Anthony Kinkel, president of Pikes Peak Community College.

On the high estimate, Colorado's community colleges would join the top 10 percent nationally in funding. With only the lowest revenue estimate, the institutions would go from dead last in funding to the top 50 percent. It would be a godsend not only to PPCC, but to the entire Pikes Peak region and the rest of the state. It would be a windfall without the imposition of a new tax. Those providing these funds would be those who choose to gamble. The hobby of gambling would become a good cause, because it would generate money community colleges desperately need. And nobody would be forced to pay a dime.

In Colorado Springs, ramifications of the windfall would be huge. Because of budgetary constraints, for example, Pikes Peak Community College has a two-year waiting list for prospective students trying to get into the nursing program. A shortage of nurses (and doctors) is one major reason health care is expensive and hard to get. Kinkel said passage of Amendment 50, and a subsequent easing of restrictions by gambling towns, would allow him to quickly

eliminate the waiting list by expanding the nursing program. Furthermore, the school would be able to add radiology and occupational therapy programs to help address the needs of the medical profession in the region and the state.

Community colleges don't get the credit they deserve, but they can be essential to the health and welfare of the communities they serve. Colorado Springs, for example, is dealing with the exodus of high tech and manufacturing jobs, resulting in a decline of the region's average wage. How has Pikes Peak Community College responded? By hiring a new dean of workforce development, charged with learning exactly how the institution can do more to help business and industry. He has three years to produce results, Kinkel said, or he won't get paid.

The funding of education, without new taxes, will be key to restoring economic vibrancy to Colorado Springs and the Pikes Peak region. Amendment 50 is a perfect example of how to get it done.

Thursday, September 18, 2008

## **Opportunity**

**By THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN**

September 18, 2008 02:37 am

**VOTERS HAVE** the chance to bolster financial support of the state's community colleges without raising taxes if they approve Amendment 50 on this year's ballot.

Amendment 50 would change the state's constitutional provision allowing gambling in three mountain towns - Cripple Creek, Central City and Black Hawk. Under current law, bets are limited to \$5 and only allows slot machines, blackjack and poker.

Amendment 50 allows residents of those three towns to expand casino gambling to fund community colleges. Those people would be able to decide to extend casino hours, add roulette and craps to the legal games, and increase the \$5 maximum bet to \$100.

The additional revenue generated through this amendment would be distributed thusly: 78 percent for financial aid and classroom instruction at the community colleges; 12 percent to Gilpin and Teller counties which are home to the three gambling towns; and 10 percent to those towns.

State officials project that the increased state take from the enhanced gaming would generate \$29 million to the community colleges in the first year, rising to \$62 million in the fifth year. That projection amounts to \$222 million over five years.

During the post-9/11 economic downturn, higher education took the brunt of state budget cuts. And the community colleges took the largest hit, although the community college system is the largest in the state by number of students it serves.

Southern Colorado has four outstanding schools in this system: Pueblo Community College, Trinidad State Junior College, Otero Junior College and Lamar Community College. They form part of the region's economic backbone with the job training and initial collegiate education they provide.

In short, the community colleges provide many Coloradans an opportunity.

They need the money. Casino gambling entails willing participants. No new taxes would be raised on the public.

Please vote YES on Amendment 50.

## Rocky Mountain News

### Gaming measure flawed, but not fatally

By Rocky Mountain News

Saturday, September 20, 2008

There's a widely held political consensus in Colorado, one we essentially share, that new state revenues should largely flow to one of three priorities: higher education, transportation or health care.

Amendment 50 would direct new funding into a segment of higher ed that typically gets short shrift - community colleges. While the amendment is flawed and had us going back and forth in weighing its merits, on balance it deserves the voters' support. It would bring more money to community colleges without hiking taxes.

Under Amendment 50, residents of Black Hawk, Central City and Cripple Creek could raise betting limits in their casinos from \$5 to \$100; they could increase the hours casinos are open (now, they must close between 2 a.m. and 8 a.m.); and they could add roulette and/or craps to the range of games (slots, blackjack and poker) now available.

Community colleges would get 78 percent of the tax revenue from the new activity, with funding to each campus based on enrollment; the host cities would get 10 percent; and the host counties would get 12 percent.

Community colleges were hit particularly hard during the state budget's downturn of a few years ago. When funding from the legislature lags, these schools lack the endowments or research grants that four-year institutions can tap.

Enter Amendment 50. If the three cities embrace the \$100 limit, 24-hour gambling and add craps and roulette, state analysts predict community colleges would get an extra \$29 million the first year after adoption and \$62 million by the fifth year.

That's a significant boost in funding. In the current fiscal year, community colleges received \$144 million from the general fund.

So what's not to like about Amendment 50? Coloradans adopted limited gaming in 1990 as an avenue to prevent the economic collapse of the three mountain towns - not as a way for Vegas-style casinos to gain a foothold in the state. A \$5 bet limit was also locked into the constitution, with no adjustment for inflation, so some increase is justified. Even with an inflation escalator, however, the maximum bet today would

be less than \$10. Amendment 50 instead seeks a twentyfold rise in the limit. A lower maximum, say \$25, would have been an easier sell.

Higher betting limits will also boost the incentive for Indian tribes to bring off-reservation casinos to Colorado. So long as the \$5 limit is in play, there's little reason for tribes to swap reservation holdings for private land near population centers as they have in other states and then build massive gambling resorts on their newly acquired property. With a limit of \$100, however, all bets are off.

We're also concerned about oversight of the windfall to gambling towns. Denver's 7 reported this year that officials in Black Hawk spent hundreds of thousands of tax dollars refurbishing their homes and taking lavish vacations. A new gusher of revenue will provide even more temptation for these abuses.

Look, we're never comfortable setting funding formulas for specific public programs in the state constitution. In this case, however, the gaming industry is already in the constitution. When raising betting stakes, voters have to direct the money somewhere.

Fortunately, the lion's share of new funds will support a public need that's often neglected in difficult economic times. Vote yes on Amendment 50.

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## **LONGMONT TIMES CALL**

(SAME EDITORIAL PUBLISHED IN THE LOVELAND REPORTER-HERALD)

Publish Date: 10/1/2008

### **Fund community colleges: Vote yes on Amendment 50**

In 1991, three Colorado cities opened their doors to legalized casino gambling. Those cities — Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City — had gained voter approval for the introduction of limited-stakes gambling. Gambling limits of \$5 per bet were put into place, and the casinos could offer only slot machines, blackjack and poker.

Tax money collected from the operations went to preserve historic structures not only in those three cities, but across the state. This year, an unusual alliance has come forth to offer Amendment 50, which would allow residents of those three gambling towns to alter the rules under which they have worked for the past 17 years. That alliance includes the casino operators, who want to be able to add more games such as craps and roulette and offer higher gambling limits, and the state's community colleges, which see an opportunity to replace funding that has been lost in the shuffle through the budget constraints put in place by the Taxpayer's Bill of



Rights. If approved, the amendment would allow the towns to increase the limit on bets to \$100 and give casinos expanded hours of operation.

And the community colleges? Under calculations from the state, they will add \$29 million in funding in the first year the new rules are in effect, with the funding increasing every year thereafter. While voters have consistently rejected expanding gambling to other communities in the state, this ballot measure should be approved, because any expansion will be limited to Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City. Moreover, voters there will be empowered to make the final decisions on how to best regulate the operations within their town limits.

The benefit to the community colleges will be great. Right now, they are often the place where the most hands-on technical education takes place, and their graduates fill many important roles in the work force. In the health-care field alone, Front Range Community College's contribution cannot be understated. In northern Colorado, Aims Community College has plans for expansion in Berthoud that could be a driver for growth for years to come.

Amendment 50 finds a way for a worthwhile state program to have its funding buttressed while taxing only those who want bigger thrills from Colorado's legalized casinos. It's worthy of support.

## **GJSentinel.com**

### **'Yes' on Amend. 50**

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Casino gambling could expand significantly in a handful of Colorado's historic mining towns if Amendment 50 on this year's ballot is approved by voters — and if voters in Black Hawk, Central City and Cripple Creek approve separate measures to authorize the expansion.

That last provision is what makes Amendment 50 acceptable to us. It doesn't force expanded gambling on the mountain towns. Instead, it leaves it to the citizens of those towns to decide.

When voters approved casino gambling in the three mountain towns in 1990, they authorized the use of slot machines, blackjack and poker, with a maximum limit of \$5 per bet.

Amendment 50 would change the 1990 constitutional language to allow roulette wheels and craps as well as the other games. It would authorize the casinos to operate round the clock and — most importantly — would allow wagers of up to \$100 per bet.

The additional revenue from the expanded gambling would be split, with 22 percent of the revenue going to the communities where gambling occurs and 78 percent designated for student aid and classroom instruction at community colleges in the state. Both are reasonable uses of that money.

Raising the bet limit from \$5 per wager to \$100 is a substantial hike. But the \$5 bet limit approved 18 years ago is clearly out of date today. No other state that allows casino gambling has such a low wager limit. Furthermore, raising the stakes doesn't mean everyone who enters the casinos will be plopping down \$100 chips at the gaming tables. But it does mean those who want to play for more than \$5 — as they can in most other casinos around the country — will have the option.

The communities where casino gambling occurs should have the option on whether to raise betting limits, increase the number of games available and extend casino hours.

Vote "Yes" on Amendment 50.

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[http://www.gjsentinel.com/hp/content/news/opinion/stories/2008/09/23/092308\\_6A\\_Amend\\_50\\_edit.html](http://www.gjsentinel.com/hp/content/news/opinion/stories/2008/09/23/092308_6A_Amend_50_edit.html)

## **BOULDER DAILY CAMERA**

### **Two modest proposals: Amendments 50 and 51 target real problems in Colorado**

By Erika Stutzman

Wednesday, October 1, 2008

There are two amendments on the November ballot that are common sense approaches to real state-wide problems.

Amendment 50, the Limited Gaming Initiative, would allow voters in cities where gaming is permitted to extend the hours, the types of games and the maximum single bets. Currently, 50 percent of gambling tax revenues flow into the state's general fund, 22 percent go to the gambling communities of Cripple Creek, Black Hawk and Central City and 28 percent goes to historic preservation around the state.

If approved, the voters in those communities would be allowed to vote for, or reject, the changes. If they did approve the changes, 22 percent of the additional revenues would go to the local government; 78 percent would go to Colorado community colleges, including the largest, Front Range Community College. Allocations would be based on enrollment. The Camera supports Amendment 50, and thinks it is a smart way to address a serious gap in higher education funding in Colorado.

In its first 15 years of operation, the gambling industry has paid about \$1 billion in taxes to the state. Opponents include people who are anti-gambling in general, and people who fear gambling revenues are too slippery to rely on. But the changes -- from \$5 minimum bets to a maximum of \$100 (and anywhere in between), the addition of roulette and craps and extending the hours -- are put before those local communities. The college system will benefit with no additional taxes to the general public in a regulated industry. Unlike some opponents, we don't view gamblers as fools being swindled -- rather, they are willful, and adult participants in a legal entertainment venue.

One additional tax we do support is Amendment 51, the Sales Tax for Developmentally Disabled Initiative. The state sales tax would increase from 2.9 percent to 3 percent on July 1, and from 3 to 3.1 percent on July 1, 2010.

Gasoline, groceries, prescription drugs, medical services and utilities would remain exempt from the sales tax.

Amendment 51 addresses a severe, real shortage in services to the developmentally disabled in Colorado. We can address the shortage now -- by increasing the sales tax and giving our community the services they deserve -- or we will pay for a crisis later, as parents and other caregivers of the underserved children and adults either die or become too old to care for their children.

Not convinced? Talk to any of these parents. We all face eventual retirement, age, death. They also face the fear that their disabled children will be -- essentially -- turned out into the streets.

Some of these children have been on the waitlist for services for 15 years. These are community members with severe autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and more. The amendment would, effectively, add 2 cents onto a \$10 purchase. That additional money would amount to an estimated \$186 million annually.

Currently, we are only able to serve half of our qualified citizens. There are about 9,700 adults and children who are on the wait-list for services -- qualified, but not served. That is expected to grow to more than 12,000 by 2012. Those Coloradans, and their parents and other caregivers, deserve to know that we, as a state, are prepared to take care of those who need it most.

-- Erika Stutzman,

for the Camera editorial board

E.W. Scripps Co.

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