YES ON PROPOSITION 1-A

INDIAN GAMING: THIS TIME, A CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT.

Thursday, February 10, 2000

Little more than a year after Californians were confronted with an astounding high-roller campaign about Indian gambling, they're continuing the issue again in the form of Proposition 1-A.

The state Supreme Court concluded last August that the state constitution didn't allow for the expansion of Indian gambling that Californians approved when they voted for Proposition 5 back in November 1998. Proposition 1-A would amend the state constitution.

Proposition 1-A has led to a new round of potshots at gambling in general, and Indian gambling in particular.

It's true that the Indian tribes are more than self-reliant; they're rolling in dough.

And it was a rather unseemly process that got this measure back on the ballot. After putting more than $9 million into California campaigns, the tribes got a new set of gaming compacts to sail through the Legislature and win Gov. Gray Davis' signature.

Opponents say Proposition 1-A would allow 50,000 to 100,000 new slot machines in California, along with an unlimited number of card games (including baccarat and twenty-one) where the house has a stake in the outcome.

But it's not as if these casinos will be right up the freeway. We fail to see the difference between driving hours to play video slots at a remote Indian reservation, or driving a couple hours more to the far more attractive Vegas casinos.

We don't want to minimize the problem of gambling addiction, which can bankrupt and destroy families. We can see a time when society may wish to halt or even reverse the expansion of gaming.

But that time has not yet come. A state that erects billboards urging residents to spend money on a government lottery and a culture that encourages speculation in profit-free companies should hardly be impinging the right of sovereign Indian tribes to trade welfare checks for wagering revenues.

We supported Proposition 5, and fail to see any change in circumstances that would cause us to oppose Proposition 1-A.

The flip side to this measure is Proposition 29. It's a referendum that would ratify the so-called Pala compact that then-Gov. Pete Wilson reached with 11 tribes in 1998. That pact provided for a much more limited expansion of gaming. Other tribes were opposed to the pact, which Proposition 5 was designed to overturn.

So if you liked Proposition 5, vote yes on Proposition 1-A, and no on Proposition 29.