THE FRESNO BEE

Yes on Proposition 1A

The Bee also recommends a "no" vote on the related Proposition 29.

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California voters return to the subject of Indian gaming with Proposition 1A on the March 7 ballot. Its detractors complain it would expand gambling on many of the state's reservations. Its backers don't dispute that. But, they argue, that expansion would also further the revitalization of California's tribes. It's a complex issue, but on balance, The Bee believes a combination of history, law and economics argue persuasively for passage of Proposition 1A.

Indians have suffered immensely over the decades of "American" expansion across the continent. Those sufferings are too many to catalog here, but they are a fundamental basis for the argument that letting Indian tribes prosper from gaming is only fair, considering all that's been taken from them -- including tens of thousands of lives -- over the past 400 years. That's no small thing, as some opponents of Proposition 1A appear to argue.

Gambling in California is at least as old as the European presence here. It is difficult to argue that casinos should be limited or eliminated on tribal lands in a state that supports its own Lottery and paramutuel wagering.

Those who argue the case on the basis of gambling's evils have a strong point: It often leads to a range of human misbehavior. But these are choices people make, and gambling has been a popular choice throughout history. There are also some constraints built into Proposition 1A that will allow some oversight, and changes in the law are possible by the same initiative mechanism.

The legal argument is that Indians enjoy a measure of sovereignty in the land they once possessed alone. The treaties between tribes and government have most often been honored in the breach -- part of that dismal history -- but we believe we are getting better at keeping our word.

And the word is this: federal law permits tribes to offer any sort of gaming that is legal in the state as a whole. That's what Proposition 1A does: It allows some Nevada-style games and slot machines that California's constitution now outlaws.

The economic impact is simply stated: Californians spend about $4 billion a year in Nevada casinos. If that money is going to spent anyway -- and it's clear from human history that it will be -- then why shouldn't it be spent here, where it will at least have some ripple effect throughout this state's economy?

Proposition 29, also on the March 7 ballot, would affirm now-dated agreements between tribes and the state forged by former Gov. Pete Wilson. Passage of Proposition 1A would render it moot. The Bee recommends a "yes" vote on Proposition 1A, and a "no" vote on Proposition 29.