

## EDITORIAL: Vote 'no' on Prop. 48 — stop Highway 99 casino



An artist rendering shows the proposed North Fork Rancheria Resort & Casino on Highway 99 north of Madera. The project would do social and environmental harm and could open the way for more casinos in a state that lacks a clear policy about gambling expansion.

### STATION CASINOS

California voters are being thrust into the middle of yet another fight over gambling, and ought to collectively say: "Enough."

It happened in 2000 when Indian tribes spent \$24 million to win monopoly rights to operate casinos on their land, and in 2008 when four tribes spent \$82 million to gain more lucrative gambling deals, and several other times.

This year, voters should take a stand against yet another gambling expansion by voting no on Proposition 48, although a no-vote would mean siding with hedge fund operators whose motives are hardly pure.

The North Fork band of Mono Indians seeks to open a 2,000-slot machine, off-reservation casino, with 50 gaming tables and a hotel, on 305 acres west of Highway 99 and north of Madera. The 1,987-member tribe teamed with Station Casinos, a Las Vegas corporation, which would operate the \$250 million gambling venue.

In 2011, President Barack Obama's Interior Department approved North Fork's request to build the casino, which would be 36 miles southwest of its reservation land in the foothills east of Madera. Gov. Jerry Brown negotiated the compact, and the Legislature approved it in 2013.

The compact would require North Fork to make one-time payments of at least \$16 million to Madera County governments and annual payments of about \$8.5 million, the Legislative Analyst Office says.

North Fork would make annual payments of \$6 million to the Wiyot tribe in exchange for Wiyot's agreement not to

build a casino on its land in Humboldt County, and \$15 million to non-gambling tribes.

A yes-vote on 48 would affirm the compact and open the way for the North Fork Mono casino along Highway 99. A no-vote would unravel the deal.

A New York hedge fund, Brigade Capital Management, is challenging the compact by funding a referendum that is Proposition 48. Brigade is aligned with a few tribes and Cheryl Schmit, founder of the nonprofit Stand Up for California, and a critic of most Indian gambling.

Brigade wants to protect its investment in the nearby Chukchansi Gold Indian casino, saying in a letter last year that a North Fork casino would "cannibalize Chukchansi Gold's revenue, forcing worker layoffs."

Brigade has put \$1.6 million into the No-on-48 campaign. Other New York investors have given \$354,000. The Table Mountain Indian casino in Fresno County, worried about the competition, has donated \$2 million to the No-on-48 campaign.

Brown seeks a yes-vote, as do North Fork, Wiyot, Station Casinos, unions whose members would help build and operate the casino, and some local politicians.

We care little that a casino in Madera would take patrons from other casinos. We do care, however, about negative social and environmental impacts of casinos.

California has 109 tribes, more than any other state, and they operate 60-plus casinos, more than enough. An Interior official said in an email last week that 71 groups are seeking to establish tribes in California, and 80 petitions are pending seeking more reservation land in the state. Whether any are real or developers' dreams is not known.

But Californians should be told how many more casinos state and federal authorities might approve. Will new casinos be located on existing reservations? Or will developers and tribes persuade Interior bureaucrats to approve petitions authorizing the purchase of land in choice locations?

The Brown administration would not say how many compacts are pending. The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs process is opaque.

There are risks to rejecting Proposition 48. North Fork could open a casino with card tables and so-called Class II machines, which operate slower than Nevada-style slots. The tribe would be under no obligation to make payments to local governments.

There are no angels in this fight. A Las Vegas casino corporation wants to expand, while a New York hedge fund wants to protect its investment. Some tribes would benefit, and others might lose.

Because of recent court decisions, California cannot compel tribes to pay into the general fund, so taxpayers would get little if any benefit.

Worse, the North Fork precedent could open the way for more casinos, in a state that lacks a clear policy about gambling expansion.

As we have consistently said since 2008 in opposing the project at this site, the casino is a classic example of "reservation shopping" and isn't what voters intended when they approved Indian gaming. And if the casino becomes reality it will bring urban congestion to a rural area.

On Nov. 4, mark your ballot "no" on Proposition 48.

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