

STATEMENT ON SECOND CASINO VOTE

Today I, along with a majority of City Council, voted in support of a repeal of the existing zoning ordinance for MGM Grand Detroit, L.L.C. and three new zoning ordinances for MGM as well as Greektown, L.L.C. and Detroit Entertainment, L.L.C.(Atwater/Circus-Circus).

This was perhaps the most difficult vote of my short career as a City Councilman. This is because the mayor's proposal to tie the new ordinances to appropriations - thus making them not subject to a referendum raises serious ethical questions. However, I believe an affirmative vote was in the best interest of the citizens of Detroit for several reasons.

First, I acknowledge that Council approval of the Mayor's plan, is a circumvention of the referendum process prescribed for in the City Charter. This is obviously a real concern. But what is an equally real concern is the fact that the casino development process can no longer be held hostage against the wishes of the majority of Detroiters.

The efforts of the Community Coalition to force yet another special election on the casino issue threatens to derail the casino development process. It also threatens to create a chilling effect on economic development in Detroit in general. Investors will be hesitant to do business in our city if they believe that their projects will face constant attacks even after they have secured the approval of the mayor, the council, and the city's voters. While the Coalition's goal of African American economic empowerment is laudable, if they are allowed to continue on their present track they will block casinos forever. However reprehensible the council's vote may seem it was the only way to move the casino development process forward in a manner consistent with a majority of Detroit's voters.

This was a difficult vote for me because the concerns of the Community Coalition about MGM's casino project are also my own. The level of African-American participation in MGM is the lowest of the three developers. In fact, it is abysmally low. Furthermore, MGM has consistently resisted requests for dialogue about increasing African-American participation in their project. For this reason, I voted no on MGM's casino plan during Council's initial vote on this issue in April.

But on August 4, Detroit voters affirmed the Mayor's choice of MGM along with Greektown and Atwater-Circus Circus as the three casino licensees. Therefore, as an elected representative of those same voters, my task is to put my personal feelings aside and help deliver those three casinos - even if one of them is MGM.

I also voted in support of the mayor's plan in order to break the tie-bar provision that has joined all three casino developers at the hip. Previously, this provision mandated that no casino developer could move forward until all three developers' zoning ordinances had been approved. For this reason, the attacks on MGM have stalled the entire casino process. Greektown and Atwater/Circus-Circus have been unable to move forward.

According, to legal opinions from both our Research and Analysis Division, Council's outside Attorney the City Law Dept., approval of these ordinances ends the tie-bar provision. Therefore, even if MGM faces renewed attacks, Greektown and Atwater/Circus-Circus will be free to move forward with their developments.

I would hope also that the Community Coalition will turn its efforts to other areas. Casino ownership, should not be viewed as the "end all and be all" of African-American economic empowerment. The Coalition's ability to mobilize grass roots support could make it an excellent vehicle for the creation of new African-American businesses, some of which could become suppliers to the casinos. While it now looks increasingly doubtful that Detroit will have an African-American-owned casino, the list of potential casino-related business opportunities for entrepreneurs is endless. Consider, for example, that there is not a single Detroit-based manufacturer of slot machines.

But the City Council will also have to be vigilant and diligent in ensuring that the casino developers comply with their respective development agreements - especially as it relates to providing contracting opportunities to African-Americans, women, and other ethnic groups.

I truly hope that today's vote will mark the end of the battle over casino ownership and the start of a healing process that will allow us to move forward with casino development once and for all.