

## Connecticut's casino racket is over; now we hurt mostly ourselves

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With its Indian casinos in Ledyard and Montville in the southeast part of the state, Connecticut started the gambling war that is engulfing the Northeast. For years Connecticut drew money from gamblers in adjacent states that had no casinos, but those states are getting into the casino business themselves and starting to fight back,

Massachusetts may be most notable among them, especially with the casino it has authorized MGM to build in Springfield to draw customers from northern and central Connecticut, who will be able to get to Springfield a lot faster than they can get to Montville and Ledyard.

So Connecticut has authorized its tribes, the Mashantucket Pequots and the Mohegans, to build another casino between Hartford and the state line in the hope of intercepting casino traffic to Springfield. But the interceptor casino probably won't have much effect unless it is as big as Springfield's, and disclosure of a proposal for a big casino at Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks has made the neighbors nervous and angered MGM.

The situation raises two policy questions for Connecticut:

1) If casinos are going to be everywhere, who needs Indian tribes to provide them?

Connecticut's casino tribes have purchased their duopoly by splitting their slot machine revenue with state government. But that revenue has been declining steadily as casinos have sprouted in nearby states, and Ledyard and Montville are not strategically located. So state government probably would profit more by licensing and taxing new casinos, operated by anyone or even state government itself, at the several major traffic intake points on the state border -- not just north of Hartford but around Stamford, Danbury, and Stonington -- and ending the duopoly of the Indian casinos and forfeiting their slot revenue. This would eliminate the repugnant ethnic privilege on which the casino business in the state is now based.

2) When casinos are everywhere, who really benefits from them?

While the interceptor casino north of Hartford is purportedly meant to save jobs for Connecticut, such a result is not likely. Just as the MGM casino in Springfield will drain the restaurant and entertainment businesses for miles around, an interceptor casino, if it is big enough to compete with Springfield, will do the same in the Hartford area. An interceptor casino may particularly impair efforts to revive downtown



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Hartford, which already has been greatly weakened by the development of Blue Back Square in West Hartford, a town that, unlike Hartford, has a large middle class that can support all sorts of commerce. Further, as long as their number is strictly limited by government licensing, casinos only concentrate income and wealth, a result government tolerates because it gets a cut.

So it would be best if Connecticut realized that its casino racket is finished, that the days of casinos making more money from out-of-staters than in-staters are over, that the money state government earns from casinos comes too much from the poor, that casinos induce crime, but that if, because of government's insatiability, we're going to have them, everybody should be able to operate one.

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**EVEN TRUMP CAN BE RIGHT:** Donald Trump may be vile and dishonest but he's not always wrong, and his repulsiveness should not be construed as an all-purpose excuse for his critics generally and Hillary Clinton particularly.

While he doesn't quite understand how to do it effectively and consistent with constitutional principles, Trump is right that the United States must get much more careful with immigration, especially immigration from countries dominated by religious fanaticism. The United States doesn't need one more immigrant or visitor who believes in the oppression of women and homosexuals and the monopolization of religion -- fascism that, as Trump suggests, is the basis of the culture of much of the Islamic world.

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