

Maynard muzzled casino opponent Steele: First selectman wouldn't let him speak to EW seniors

Posted: Thursday, March 23, 2017 11:29 am | Updated: 9:06 pm, Thu Mar 23, 2017.

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Journal Inquirer

EAST WINDSOR — Former U.S. Rep. Robert H. Steele says the town's first selectman is preventing him from speaking at the Senior Center because it might be upsetting to his audience.

Steele, a leading opponent of casino gambling in the region, has previously spoken out against the proposed \$200 million to \$300 million casino for East Windsor.

MMCT Venture — a joint effort by the owners of Foxwoods Resort Casino and Mohegan Sun — has proposed a casino to compete with a \$950 million casino currently being developed in Springfield by MGM Resorts International.

In emails obtained by the Journal Inquirer, John Dunn, a member of the Coalition Against Casino Expansion in Connecticut, says First Selectman Robert Maynard told him that Steele, who represented the state's 2nd District in the 1970s, could not give a presentation before the seniors because Steele might "upset" them.

The coalition, a group affiliated with over a dozen religious organizations and the Connecticut League of Women Voters, has been pushing for a town referendum on the proposal.

According to Dunn, Maynard said his concerns stem from the content of Steele's novel, "The Curse: Big-Time Gambling's Seduction of a Small New England Town," as well as a speech he delivered earlier this month at an anti-casino forum held by the coalition.

Steele's novel is based on the expansion of casino gambling to Connecticut in the 1990s with the openings of Foxwoods Resort Casino and the Mohegan Sun casino. According to Steele's website, the novel depicts "a small, quintessential New England town" that must choose between "preserving its character or accepting an extraordinary proposal that will change it forever."

During the forum held March 6, Steele gave a presentation detailing what he claims are detrimental social and economic effects caused by casino gambling, including gambling addiction and the cannibalization of local business' profits.

This morning, Steele criticized Maynard's decision and said the coalition is hopeful that he will change his mind.

"To think some seniors might be upset to hear both sides of the story is a little far fetched," Steele said, arguing that MMCT has "dominated the dialogue" throughout the process.

"The seniors are a critically important part of the town and are active voters in any referendum," he said. "It's important that everyone understand the impact the casino will have on the community."

Maynard said this morning he did not feel it was appropriate for Steele to speak at the town's senior center because the casino proposal is now pending approval at the state legislature and has already been approved by East Windsor.

Maynard also made a reference to Steele's book when explaining why he blocked the move, and stated that he is unfamiliar with Dunn, who does not live in East Windsor and was the person who contacted Maynard to book the appearance.

http://www.journalinquirer.com/public/maynard-muzzled-casino-opponent-steele-first-selectman-wouldn-t-let/article_82861b10-0fdd-11e7-86a2-4bf30374b152.html