

# VIEWPOINT

## ANOTHER VOICE

### Casino 'done deal': stand united for Cascade Locks

By RODGER SCHOCK

**O**utside forces are mobilizing to keep a casino out of Cascade Locks. But these folks are waging the biggest bluff of all — that the project can be kept out of the Gorge altogether.

My hat goes off to Oregon Gov. Ted Kulongoski and U.S. Rep. Greg Walden for realizing that argument is badly flawed and stepping up to do the right thing. They support allowing the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to set up shop in the willing community of Cascade Locks. Because the other option is that federal law and treaty rights will allow the tribes to build on a 40-acre trust parcel just east of Hood River.

Don't fool yourself; it really will be one of these two choices for the following reasons:

1. Opponents of the casino clamor that the tribes cannot develop their trust land without violating federal Scenic Area rules. The problem with that argument is that Native American property is expressly exempt from the regulations of the National Scenic Act. The tribes can do whatever they want with the property regardless of what the Act says. We're fortunate that the tribes, so far, have agreed to be a good neighbor and manage its

trust land consistent with the management of adjacent Forest Service holdings.

2. Federal law allows the tribe to convert the 200-acres of newly purchased land into "Sovereign" trust parcels. Contrary to arguments presented by opponents, the tribe has a well-established right under a 1934 federal law to purchase property that can be taken into trust. That is one of the many "Indian rights" that the Gorge Act's "savings" clause preserved.

3. It is a fallacy to believe the argument that the tribes can build a casino but can't operate it without a gaming compact signed by the governor and approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Getting a compact, which the governor is required by federal law to negotiate in good faith, hasn't proven to be much of a problem in the past. And, just so you know, it may not even be needed. Ever hear of a "Class II" tribal casino? They are all over south Florida and other parts of the country. They look and feel an awful lot like a Las Vegas casino — except they don't require a compact with the governor and they don't need the Interior Secretary's approval.

The bottom line here is that if we listen to the voices of dissent and do not support the

placement of a casino in Cascade Locks, we may well see what a "Class II" casino looks like on the bluff above Hood River.

In recent weeks we've all heard comments that conclude the tribes could not build a casino on their Hood River trust land. However, the Warm Springs' ability to develop the property is a legal question — and I'm betting on the future of our community on the sound advice of Gov. Kulongoski. I figure he knows what he's talking about as a former Attorney General and Supreme Court justice. In fact, I don't know of any informed elected or appointed official who would tell you that a casino wasn't a slam dunk for Hood River. So, given that a casino is certainly a "done deal" for one of the two Gorge sites, let's stand united so that it will be built in a town that desperately needs the economic boost. The Warm Springs are in the same dire financial straits and the proposed casino tips substantially on the plus side for both of these communities. Economic health for needy communities and continued protection for the Columbia River Gorge! "What's wrong with that?"

■  
*Rodger Schock is chairman of the Hood River County Board of Commissioners.*