

# Blurring the gorge casino issue

*A deceptive TV ad artfully muddles the hard decision Oregon's governor had to make on Cascade Locks*

## EDITORIAL PAGES

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Editorial

Oregonians are being treated to a TV ad campaign that's just about as slick as a poker card dealt from the bottom of the deck.

"Gov. Kulongoski thinks Oregon needs another casino," the narrator solemnly intones as images of Ted Kulongoski and the Columbia River Gorge fill the television screen.

That deceptive bit of sarcasm pretty much sets the tone for the remaining 25 seconds of the spot urging Oregonians to oppose plans for a tribal casino in the scenic gorge. The edgy political-campaign-style ad was paid for by an unusual coalition that includes environmental organizations, a Christian group, the Oregon Restaurant Association and the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Kulongoski thinks Oregon needs another casino? Not true. Like many of us, he's on record saying just the opposite.

But the ad slyly sets up Kulongoski as its villainous straw man, while making no mention whatsoever of the coalition's true opponent, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs.

That's misleading, but it's not stupid. Why risk bashing a poor tribe, quite possibly generating sympathy for it, when you can get away with attacking a politician instead?

It's not Kulongoski who wants a casino in the Columbia Gorge. It's the people of Warm Springs, and it's a pretty good bet they're going to get one.

Kulongoski had to face that reality this spring when he negotiated a deal with the tribes allowing them to build an off-reservation casino in the small gorge community of Cascade Locks.

Had he said no, the tribes would have gone ahead instead with a casino on trust land they own near Hood River — also in the gorge.

That land was in tribal hands before Congress passed the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in 1988, so the Warm Springs have a good chance of getting a federal OK for a casino there. Trouble is, nobody wants it in Hood River.

It's a different story at Cascade Locks, about 20 miles closer to Portland on Interstate 84. The small community overwhelmingly supports the casino plan, and the tribes' property there is already zoned for resort or industrial use.

Spokesmen for the anti-casino coalition, noting that the federal government may block the Cascade Locks plan, argue unconvincingly that a Hood River casino might also be blocked. They also maintain that the Warm Springs are bluffing about Hood River.

Kulongoski doesn't buy that, and he's right. If the tribes can't build in Cascade Locks, it's ludicrous to think they won't replace the struggling casino on their remote reservation with one at Hood River in the busy heart of the gorge.

The ad muddles this dispute by setting up and arguing a sham case, while the actual case is quite different. Also disingenuous is the claim that the casino would "trash the gorge," when in fact some other resort or industry would eventually be developed on the former rock quarry site if the casino is blocked.

The coalition's ad does have one line, however, that is completely accurate and supportable if applied to the notion of honest public debate:

"Oregon deserves better."