

Congresswoman Candice Miller Testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee

Chairman Rahall, Ranking member Young and members of the committee

Thank you all for holding this hearing today. I am here to urge you to approve this legislation which would allow for a casino in the City of Port Huron, Michigan - a city that I am proud to represent in Congress.

Port Huron is a beautiful city, a proud city, which has fallen on extremely difficult economic times. It's no secret that my state is suffering from a recession - we have the highest unemployment in the nation, the lowest personal income growth in the nation, we have among the highest foreclosure rates in the nation, and you can take all of those factors into consideration and in the case of Port Huron, probably double them.

Interestingly enough, Port Huron is one of the only US border crossing towns on the northern tier where there is a casino on the Canadian side

of the border and not one on the American side.

In fact, that was the most persuasive argument that the leaders of the city of Detroit used when they asked to be allowed to have casinos in Detroit - because all the Americans were simply spending their money in the Windsor, Ontario casino - to the detriment of Detroit. Of course now that they have theirs, they don't want anyone else to have anything similar.

Because in Port Huron you can just simply look across the St. Clair River at the Canadian casino, just 10 minutes away, where 80% of their revenue is from Americans.

A Canadian casino which gives back millions of dollars each year to local municipalities which they use to pay for police or fire, fixing their roads, to support their schools or further economic development.

And all the city of Port Huron is asking for is for Congress to approve a settlement which would allow the Bay Mills Indian Community to build a casino - and generate jobs and revenue - and allow them to work their own way back into some economic activity which this casino will most certainly provide, and will help American citizens to do the same for an American city that

our Canadian neighbors, right across the river, are doing for their citizens.

Let me also make the committee aware of a unique distinction in the city of Port Huron it is home to the Blue Water Bridge, which is the second busiest border crossing on the northern tier - and the federal government is in the process of a huge expansion of the existing footprint of the current bridge plaza - and in that process they will be condemning hundreds of acres of valuable residential property and taking it off the tax rolls.

We think this could have a significant negative impact on the city's ability to survive and it would only seem fair that if the federal government is forcing the city to live with its decision because it benefits commerce between the United States and Canada, then it would certainly be fair to try and compensate the city in some way, and passing this legislation would be very helpful.

I believe in representative government - I think we all do - and I think that most of us would agree that the member of Congress, who represents a particular district, generally understands what the people of that district want

- especially if it is an activity that has absolutely zero impact on another district.

So I would point out - that this legislation settles a land claim that has been simmering for many years - started during a time in our nation's history when Native Americans were routinely taken advantage of.

In this case - a former Governor of Michigan promised the Bay Mills Indian Community a 110 acre parcel of property - located in Mr. Stupak's district - but then the government seized the land from the tribe and sold it.

Subsequently, former Michigan Governor John Engler reached an agreement with the tribe to abandon its claim to that piece of property in exchange for some acreage in Port Huron, in my district

This agreement was also approved by the citizens of Port Huron in a city wide vote
This legislation was first put forward for congressional approval by my predecessor David Bonior in the House and Senator Stabenow in the Senate during the 107th Congress

Today it is being advanced in a bi-partisan way by myself and Mr. Stupak.

This legislation is supported by every single elected official who represents the city of Port Huron in any capacity. That includes the entire City Council, the county commissioners, the state representatives, the state senator, myself, both United States Senators, Stabenow and Levin, as well as our current Governor Jennifer Granholm.

This legislation is not asking the federal government - or anyone else for a hand out- we are simply asking for fairness - and an opportunity

This issue has absolutely zero to do with partisanship - clearly both Republicans and Democrats support the plan.

But I will make a personal observation - and that is that most of the opposition is based purely on greed. It's all about the money and making sure that one part of the state can protect its revenue source from new competition -- and the heck with everyone else.

Congress has lived through some extremely painful revelations in recent years revelations about high paid lobbyists who tried to manipulate people and elected officials about casino gaming - and the face of that scandalous behavior is Jack Abramoff - who successfully lobbied against the city of Port Huron on this very legislation during the 107th Congress.

And I raise this because of a recent mailing that went out in Michigan - not by Jack Abramoff - but by some who have taken a page out of his playbook

Here is a copy of that mail piece - from Gambling Watch Michigan - a group which is asking citizens to call myself, Mr. Stupak, Mr. Dingell and our two United States Senators and voice their objections to 2 new casinos.

They don't tell folks where they are; they just say we have enough casinos in Michigan. Sent from an address- not in my district, or Mr. Stupak's or Mr. Dingell's, it is in fact based in the district of another member from Michigan.

We had never heard of this group so we checked with the state on when they were registered and

who their principles are. This group just incorporated about 2 weeks ago and their principle officer is a well known political consultant who has done extensive work on behalf of gambling interests in Michigan and whose husband is a lobbyist who works for a lobbying firm who represents - guess what - other casinos now operating in Michigan.

Casinos who do not want any competition.

Mr. Chairman and members of this committee - this legislation is consistent with provisions of IGRA - and the gaming facility that would be built would be governed by IGRA rules. On behalf of the wonderful, hardworking and self reliant people of the city of Port Huron I am asking you to give us the opportunity to help ourselves and support this legislation.