

In his final days as Pennsylvania Governor, Edward G. Rendell has once again thrust himself into the debate surrounding the state's last remaining casino resort license.

Rendell was quoted in a *Harrisburg Patriot News* article today, stating that if

he were a decision-maker in the casino licensing process, he "wouldn't put one close to a battlefield, but that's not my call."

As you know by now, Rendell opposes the proposed \$75 million Mason Dixon Resort & Casino in Cumberland Township, about a half-mile from an isolated portion of the 6,000-acre Gettysburg National Military Park.

It was not the first time he's made such a statement (see September 2010), when Rendell said he still thinks that the Gettysburg area is the "wrong place" for a casino, citing the area's tourism and battlefield. The two-term outgoing Democratic leader similarly opposed the failed Crossroads Gaming Resort in Straban Township in 2005-06.

Once again, the timing of Rendell's remarks are impeccable, as the Gaming Control Board is scheduled to meet Thursday, and possibly award the license to one of four candidates, including the Mason Dixon project.

Rendell's comments are amazing, in many areas, particularly the fact that even he has acknowledged that he has no role in the process.

(The state's gambling industry is regulated by the independent seven-member Gaming Control Board, designed by law to be devoid of political influence).

So, why does he continue to volunteer his opinion?

It's worth noting that out of all four applicants seeking the state's lone remaining Category Three

slots resort license - - - including proposals in western Pennsylvania, Mechanicsburg and the Poconos - - - Rendell has offered his opinion on only one project: the proposed Gettysburg resort.

First, It has been noted that Rendell's former law firm, Ballard Spahr, also represents the group that many consider the top candidate for the license, the Nemaocolin Resort in Wharton Township.

Second, it's also no secret that Joseph Hardy, investor behind the Nemaocolin project and founder of 84 Lumber has been a generous donor of Rendell's campaigns over a years.

A simple review of campaign finance records reveals that Hardy has donated millions of dollars to Rendell, and other top Pennsylvania politicians who played a key role in developing the state's gaming law, enacted in 2004-04. Gettysburg project.

By comparison, David LeVan, investor behind the Mason Dixon project, donated approximately \$100,000 over a multi-year period to Rendell when he ran for mayor of Philadelphia.

Opponents of the Gettysburg project aim hostility toward LeVan for his donations to LeVan, but there has not been such animosity toward Hardy, at least locally.

Third, Rendell opposes a casino "so close to a battlefield," but he made no such outlandish comments in opposing the Valley Forge Convention Resort, which was awarded a license 18 months ago, but has yet to open as it is under litigation. The resort is, of course, located beside the Valley Forge National Historic Park.

"You could throw a football from the parking lot of the Valley Forge Convention Center onto the park," said Mason Dixon spokesman David La Torre. (Ballard-Spahr also represents the court-stalled Valley Forge project).

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Written by Administrator

Tuesday, 04 January 2011 05:20 -

“Our project is located about a mile from Gettysburg National Military Park (and) the closest park entrance is two miles away.” La Torre noted that under current plans, casino investors would convert the existing 70,000 square-foot All-Star Sports Complex into a resort casino, with up to 600 slot machines and 50 table games. “Our project would not be visible from the park or even (Emmitsburg) road,” said La Torre.

Similarly, the Nemaocolin project, according to investors, is about three-four miles away from the Fort Necessity park, yet that project doesn't seem to have the level of opposition.

In testimony Nov. 16 before the Gaming Control Board, gaming regulator Gary Sojka asked Nemaocolin representatives “Do people consider that Hallowed Ground? Have you heard objections?” Nemaocolin Resort General Manager Chris Plummer replied: “I have not.”

Mason Dixon co-investor Joseph Lashinger Jr. has pointed out that “there is casino located closer to the Liberty Bell” in Philadelphia than the Eisenhower Inn - site of the proposed Cumberland Township casino - is in proximity to the Gettysburg Battlefield.

“I'm just totally lost on that argument,” Lashinger said previously.

Lastly, the timing of Rendell's comments are noteworthy, with the approaching regularly-scheduled Jan. 6 meeting of the state's Gaming Control Board.

We don't know if the board has its mind made up, and even if they don't, Rendell's comments won't be a factor, according to GCB spokesman Doug Harbach, since the public record closed several months ago.

“The governor's timing is interesting considering the pending license is set to be granted within days,” said La Torre. “It's disappointing that he wasn't even asked about our project during his press conference - he volunteered his opinion.”

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The Gettysburg-area project is supported by Cumberland Township supervisors, the Adams County Commissioners, 200 businesses and the local Chamber of Commerce. But it also has nationwide opposition in the form of the Civil War Preservation Trust, which launched a fundraising campaign to combat the plan, and the American Legion.

Even so, Gettysburg area state lawmakers Dan Moul and Richard Alloway have stayed out of the debate, and have remained non-committal on the project, because they don't want to sway the Gaming Control Board.

Rendell doesn't have a vote, but the three board members the he appointed to the Gaming Control Board (Chairman Gregory Fajt, James Ginty and Kenneth Trujillo) do have a vote.

Why hasn't Rendell volunteered such comments about the Nemaquin, Poconos or Mechanicsburg projects?

Odd timing by Rendell.

~ **Submitted by: Scot A. Pitzer, Times Staff Writer**

.Reader comments are encouraged. Contact Scot Pitzer directly at 717.334.1131, ext. 247,

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