

Written by Administrator
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Residents of Wood Village have been getting dire warnings in their mailboxes: The casino proposed by Measure 75 will bring depravity to their town.

"A casino will attract drinking, gambling, and worse ..." one mailer says.

What could be worse for this town of 3,130? "Raising our crime rate and putting our kids in danger," the mailer adds.

And who is sounding the alarm about the evil of casinos?

Other casinos. Namely, tribal casinos led by the Grand Ronde tribes, whose Spirit Mountain casino has bankrolled most of the campaign against Measure 75.

Spirit Mountain would take the biggest financial hit -- potentially losing hundreds of millions of dollars -- if the casino is built.

Measure 75 backers call the mailers rank hypocrisy and say a casino doesn't necessarily mean more crime for a community.

The tribes-funded opposition stands by its claims that casinos increase crime -- except, however, their casinos.

Measure 75 seeks to authorize a casino at Wood Village, about 16 miles east of downtown Portland. It could have as many as 3,500 slots -- bigger than any casino in Las Vegas. Voters would still need to amend the state constitution to lift a casino ban they passed in 1984.

And there's another hurdle that, which explains the mailings aimed at Wood Village voters.

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In 2007, the Legislature -- lobbied by tribes -- required a local vote before a casino could be located in a city. Wood Village residents might get that chance in the future. Opponents not only want to defeat Measure 75, but also hope Wood Village votes against the measure on Nov. 2 so foes can argue the local community doesn't want the casino.

The Grand Ronde's Spirit Mountain casino is about 60 miles from Portland on Highway 18, the closest tribal casino to the state's biggest population center.

Justin Martin, a Grand Ronde member who is leading the campaign against Measure 75, said the Wood Village casino would bring a "Vegas-style" facility to the Portland area. He points to academic research that shows area crime rates rise after a casino arrives.

Martin says the claim that casinos are crime magnets doesn't necessarily apply to tribal casinos, which he said have worked with local communities to keep out the vice that follows some casinos elsewhere.

"We're trying to draw a line between what's going to happen in a major urban area versus what happens in a rural area," Martin said. "What we have been able to do at Grand Ronde, in terms of public safety, has given us a solid record of keeping those kinds of things from happening."

Supporters of Measure 75 point to evidence that show exactly that. Other studies show some crime rates rise after a casino moves in, but that community support and strong casino security can control and even reduce crime.

"Many areas are safer than they were before because criminal elements are not interested in being in areas that have lots of security," said Lake Oswego businessman Bruce Studer, a co-petitioner of the measure. "Our facility will have 66 security personnel on staff 24/7. It will be safer than Disneyland."

Studer and his co-petitioner, Matt Rossman, said they have talked to Wood Village officials and the Multnomah County sheriff's office about what would be needed in terms of security and community law enforcement if the casino is built.

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They also designed the measure to require that the casino share revenues with Wood Village, Multnomah County and nearby cities. In all, 25 percent of the casino's gross would go to schools, counties, cities and other state programs.

Studer said the opponents really aren't concerned about stopping crime in Wood Village.

"Stopping competition is what is driving our opponent," Studer said. "They are trying to buy a defeat with a misleading campaign because they know they can't win in a fair fight."

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