

Written by Administrator  
Monday, 18 October 2021 15:13 -

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When voters in Aurora overwhelmingly supported Amendment 77 in 2020, giving Black Hawk, Central City and Cripple Creek voters the right to raise betting limits and introduce new games, they were supporting a proud Colorado tradition of voter-led changes to gambling law. They also bet on the measure making a positive impact on Aurora's community college students, without having to introduce gaming in their own communities.

When it comes to gambling, Colorado communities get to have it both ways. Casino towns contribute tens of millions to our state annually, including nearly \$12 million for community colleges last year during the height of the pandemic. We also keep gambling in the communities who are willing and equipped to deal with the regulatory and public safety aspects of the industry.

Ward VI residents who elected me have been unequivocal: they want family-oriented recreational opportunities, well-kept roads, retail shopping, and safe neighborhoods. They're not willing to extend gaming rights to their communities to achieve it, though. As recently as 2014, voters in Aurora overwhelmingly came out against expanding gambling at Arapahoe Park, the horse racetrack, in Arapahoe County. That result was the same as a similar 2003 effort to expand gambling in Aurora.

With gambling comes increased need for law enforcement at facilities that offer gaming, as well as in our communities. By keeping gambling as a tourist industry for Black Hawk, Central City and Cripple Creek, we reduce the need for extended law enforcement across the state, especially as we face shortages of officers. The entertainment destinations also prevent kids from interacting with casino games.

Colorado has gone to great extent to keep gambling in areas that welcome it. Since 2015, the Colorado legislature has taken prudent steps to ban gambling in illegal gambling arcades (HB 15-1047) and illegal slot machines (HB 18-1234) in our communities. These illegal games had a detrimental effect on Aurora's communities until we stepped up to control them.

Polling among Colorado voters consistently demonstrates Coloradans' belief that voters in each community should make their own decisions about approving games. 2019 polling data showed that 77% of likely Colorado voters supported the right of the gaming town residents to control the future of Colorado gaming. The people who live there are vested in their communities, want

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to protect them and know best how to do it.

Despite not wanting gambling in Aurora itself, our residents benefit hugely from expanded gaming in the mountains. Colorado community colleges have struggled to retain funding and students during the COVID-19 crisis, and the higher bet limits and expanded game options in effect this summer at Colorado casinos will have a positive impact on thousands of Colorado community college students. Already, casinos have contributed over \$37 million dollars in state taxes this summer alone, a sign of successfully implementing the changes allowed by Amendment 77.

In addition to supporting statewide community colleges, Colorado casinos also pay into the State Historical Fund and the State General Fund. Aurora benefits from allocations from both funds, without needing to spend additional money regulating and enforcing gambling rules.

Outside of Aurora, the statewide benefits of Colorado casinos' tax revenue are invaluable. Every year, our gaming towns' tax impact is greater than \$300 million, and the beneficiaries of that revenue are wide ranging. More than \$26 million supports the state's heritage tourism, an industry that draws thousands of people and their dollars to Colorado destinations. And, since the legalization of sports betting, more than \$7 million in annual casino tax revenue funds the Colorado Water Plan, an initiative that hopes to secure our state's water future. In and out of Aurora, the economic impact of Colorado's commercial casinos confers enormous benefits on us all.

As I work closely with local law enforcement, emergency medical services, and fire departments to build on our positive relationships, better understand our community's needs and ensure the delivery of excellent services I'm grateful that we can focus on what matters most to our communities. We are fortunate to live in a city that annually balances its budget while delivering exceptional services. All while our residents have access to three premier gambling entertainment destinations within a couple of hours who have voted to support the necessary infrastructure casinos require.

I will continue to coordinate with residents, departments, and city management to ensure families are able to enjoy our great outdoors, whether by maintaining infrastructure, improving recreational facilities, or protecting and enhancing the beauty of natural, open spaces. These benefits attract businesses with well-paying jobs that attract the people and related services that create a cycle of opportunity and prosperity.

## FRANCOISE BERGAN: Growing Colorado casino town is a boon for all — YES on 77

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In Colorado we get to have it both ways: a strong gambling and casino industry that provides millions each year to the quality of life we're accustomed to, without introducing gambling in communities that aren't ready or willing to manage it.

*Francoise Bergan is a member of the Aurora City Council in Colorado, representing Ward VI.*

**Read more** <https://sentinelcolorado.com/1gridoped/francoise-bergan-growing-colorado-casino-town-is-a-boon-for-all-yes-on-77/>