



City of Port Huron 100 McMorran Boulevard Port Huron, Michigan 48060

Office of the Mayor

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June 21, 2004

Committee on Resources
U. S. House of Representatives
1328 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D. C. 20515

Re: H.R. 831 and H.R. 2793

Dear Sirs:

My name is B. Mark Neal. I am Mayor of the City of Port Huron in Michigan. I have been invited to testify before the Committee on Thursday, June 24, 2004.

As Mayor of Port Huron, I represent approximately 32,000 residents of the city. I have been Mayor for the last three years and a Council Member for 14 years prior to becoming Mayor. As a member of the Port Huron City Council, I have been very pro-business and proactive in trying to create employment opportunities for our residents. These house bills would go a long way in trying to create more jobs in Port Huron and the region.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the Committee.

Very truly yours,

B. Mark Neal

Mayor

/pk



Chairman Pombo, ranking member Rahall, ladies and gentlemen of the committee, my name is Mark Neal, I am Mayor of the City of Port Huron, in the Great Lakes state of Michigan. Thank you for allowing me a few minutes of your time to share with you important facts about my city .

Port Huron is a city with a population of 32,000 people. We are the county seat for St. Clair County, which has a population of 175,000. We sit on the US/Canadian Border just across the St. Clair River from Sarnia, Ontario. We currently have an unemployment rate approaching 20 percent. In addition, we have many citizens that are below the poverty level. We are very much a blue collar community .

Our community has been devastated by the loss of employment opportunities; we had two industries that provided 7,500 jobs. One company had 5,000 employees and another had 2,500 employees. The one with 5,000 employees has reduced their workforce to 500 employees and the company with 2,500 employees closed their doors. We have an active Economic Development Alliance that helps promote our industrial park. Many of the tenants in our industrial park are suppliers for the auto industry. Unfortunately, when the Big Three (Ford, GM, and Chrysler) say they need to cut their costs, they turn to their suppliers, which means we are the first to suffer from any downturn and the last to recover. Whenever we get a new tenant in our park, another one closes its doors.

Our community is in desperate need of employment opportunities. That's why we asked the Bay Mills Tribe to consider resolving their land claim by accepting land in Port Huron for their economic development. With the proposed casino and their anticipation of employing 3,000 to 3,500 people at an above average wage, the economic benefit to our community would be tremendous. Those wages

would be turned over many times in our community. You will probably hear from people who object to gaming and casinos. We have heard from those people as well. However, our community had an advisory vote in 2001 and the proposed casino won approval with over 54% of the vote. The main reason that the vote passed is because our area is already exposed to casino gaming. The Canadian government operates a casino just across the Blue Water Bridge (literally 500 yards from our site) in Port Huron. It takes less than ten minutes to get to the Canadian casino. 75-80 percent of their customers come from the States. So to hear people say they don't want another casino in Michigan, our people are already gambling and they are doing it in Canada. Unfortunately, our community doesn't receive any benefit. No jobs, no money for our local government, no money for schools and no money for our social services.

There are numerous entities that would benefit from a casino if it were located in Port Huron. I have included letters of support from my city council, the Economic Development Alliance of St. Clair County, the Superintendent of the Intermediate School District of St. Clair County, the United Way of St. Clair County as well as letters from local labor unions that support the casino. It is also important to note that Port Huron is the only border city in the northern tier that doesn't have a casino.

If the proposed Bay Mills Indian Community land claim settlement is given Congressional approval, the 3,000 plus jobs that would be created would make the casino the largest employer not only in Port Huron but in St. Clair County as well. The City of Port Huron needs these jobs. The region needs these jobs. I am here to speak on behalf of my community to request your support for immediate passage of H.R. 831, the Bay Mills Indian Community Land Claim Settlement Act. We cannot afford to wait any longer for this legislation to be enacted as it

will result in a massive boost to our economy that will strengthen the Port Huron community and the lives of our citizens. I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to our Congresswoman, Candice Miller for championing H.R. 831 and fighting so hard to do her part to turn the economy around for her constituents. I urge the chairman and the members of this committee to help her do right by our community .



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June 7, 2004

**The Honorable Richard W. Pombo ChairDian,
Committee on Resources 1324 Longworth
House Office Building Washington DC 20515**

Dear Representative Pombo:

As Mayor, and on behalf of my fellow Council members, and administration of the City of Port Huron. we want to reconfirm our support for the development of a casino in our city. Our position is based on formal and documented public input. After much public involvement and discussion, on June 26, 2001, the citizens of Port Huron voted to support the development of a casino project in Port Huron with a substantial 54% approval. This proposal was strongly supported by a broad range of professionals, business organizations, social groups, the *Port Huron Times Herald* and organized labor.

The City of Port Huron, and St. Clair County as a whole, is struggling with an unemployment rate that is nearing double the rest of Michigan, losses in its industrial base, a high percentage of low- income population, and a \$186,000,000 State-mandated sewer separation and infrastructure project that are all contributing to the increasing financial hardships facing Port Huron today. Our local economy desperately needs to be diversified.

While we struggle every day with declining employment opportunities for our citizens, declining tax revenues and increasing operational and developmental costs, our citizens watch an endless parade of people crossing the Blue Water Bridge to spend hundreds of millions of our dollars in the casino just across the river in Canada. It is estimated that 76% of the Canadian casino revenues are U.S. dollars. As a border community, we do know this: The Canadian communities just across the river from us (Point Edward and Sarnia) are experiencing tremendous growth and development which their leadership tells us is directly related to the success of their casino operations and the substantial flow of U.S. dollars from Michigan. While the casino development in Port Huron has been delayed for over three years, the Canadian cities just across the river are being rebuilt, providing thousands of well-paying Canadian jobs funded with U .S. dollars. You can understand how important this casino project is to the stability of our community and how it will strengthen Port Huron's tourism industry. The citizens and leadership, both governmental and

Representative Pombo

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business, are anxious to move forward with this development. The Port Huron City Council, City Administration, and the entire City of Port Huron is available to you at any time to help, to advise, and to be part of this important opportunity for the citizens of Port Huron and the State of Michigan.

Representative Pombo, we urgently request that you and your office continue your hard work for our community. Our city, our state, but most importantly our citizens, await the completion of this process that is so long overdue.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

B. Mark Neal

Mayor

Thomas J. Hutka

City Manager