

**By BRIAN ACKLEY**  
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One of the better slogans making the rounds among those generally against gambling identifies lotteries and casinos as a tax on people who are bad at math.

Odds are, as a Buffalo Niagara resident, you already have a deeply entrenched opinion on opening a Buffalo-area gambling hall. But as a supporter, lukewarm at best, the question needs to be asked: is anyone else getting a little queasy over Seneca Casino II?

News that Cheektowaga has become the primary focus for a second such structure has rekindled now wearying public debate about everything from the merits of casinos to the color of chips used at the blackjack table. Of course, how serious the Senecas are about placing it there is readily open for debate. Town officials can't even seem to keep the story straight: today the land will house a casino, tomorrow maybe it's a golf course. And, by the way, while the bulldozers are handy, does anyone object to tax-free gas and cigarettes? Where there are smoke signals, there is fire.

It's amazing that rational people still swallow so much Lake Erie water when associating casinos with the promise of dizzying development and prosperity, even in the face of overwhelming, credible, fact-based evidence that its overall economic impact is relatively little. Pilot Field, or whatever they are calling it this year, and the arena stand as stunningly stark examples about what little boost entertainment venues actually give to peripheral development.

What's scary is not the pro or con arguments for or against a casino, or where it may end up, or who in the end may be the biggest beneficiaries. The palm sweat forms not because of those now largely insignificant issues – after all, a casino will be built somewhere in the area, and ultimately, it won't make a huge difference if it's in Buffalo, Cheektowaga or dangling from underneath the Skyway. It trickles because proponents brilliantly argued that building a casino was at least something, because the state was blinded by miles-high piles of shiny quarters in a time of economic distress, because Buffalo couldn't build a bridge, zoo, convention center or fish store. We begged the Senecas to show up, accountability and details be damned.

It may be no coincidence that a neighboring tribe, the Oneida's, have purchased and removed from the tax rolls some 6,000 acres of land in Madison County, thanks to its successful Turning Stone gambling operations. Madison is a county which, by the way, raised its property taxes more than 15 percent just last year. And, maybe it's possible there's a connection that of the 45 gas stations operating there before the tribe opened a chain of tax-free outlets, eight remain in business. Who cared about those jobs?

Why is it the one time we actually need our leaders to go into a smoke-filled room, puff on a peace pipe and come out with some consensus plan, they won't, or worse yet, can't. Last week's little triumvirate tete-a-tete between George Pataki, Joel Giambra and Anthony Masiello – designed to find some common voice on the whole issue -- yielded a watermelon, lemon and orange on the pay line.

For decades, and it's fully understandable, the relationship between Native Americans and the rest of us has been fraught with deceit, distrust, and disillusionment. But aren't there even a few people on each side who can appreciate and embrace the unique opportunity such a union could ultimately represent? Then, maybe we all could enjoy a real and bountiful harvest, not just three cherries on a slot machine.

*(Brian Ackley is a columnist for the Weekly Independent Newspapers (WIN) of Western New York. WIN is a consortium of 19 community weekly newspapers in Erie and Niagara counties with a combined paid circulation of 75,000 homes, providing collaborative advertising and editorial support for member publications. For more information on WIN, or to provide feedback on this column, visit our website at [www.wnynewspapers.com](http://www.wnynewspapers.com). Opinions expressed here are those of the author.)*