

READERS' LETTERS

Constitutional amendment is ploy to ease way for casino

I have been a strong supporter of Senate President M. Teresa Paiva Weed, and I know that before entering the Senate she had a distinguished legal career, representing, among others, Newport Grand Jai Alai. However, her statement (with Rep. Marvin Abney) in the May 21 Newport Daily News that changing the state constitution is the "best way" to prevent the legislature from allowing a casino at Newport Grand to move to any other part of the city is highly questionable.

First, a constitutional amendment cannot be accomplished overnight, or even in this legislative session. Amending the Rhode Island Constitution requires a roll call vote of a majority of the members elected to each house, submission to the voters at the next general election, and then, if approved by a statewide majority vote, it becomes part of the constitution. (See Rhode Island Constitution, Article XIV, Section 1.)

Thus a constitutional amendment could not be presented to the voters, at the earliest, until November of this year. That will require introducing the proposed amendment into both houses of the General Assembly, and getting a majority of their colleagues to vote for it before the end of this legislative session in about a month. And doing this when the legislature is already likely to put the question of a constitutional convention on the ballot? Not very likely.

Second, if they succeed in this, a majority of all Rhode Island voters must be persuaded to change the state constitution just to please those stubborn residents of Newport who keep voting against casinos. Remember, in the last general election, in 2012, a clear majority of Rhode Islanders approved casino proposals for both Lincoln and Newport. They may not be so eager to place a special restriction on a casino in Newport.

But if they do agree and vote to add this amendment to the Rhode Island Constitution, then the legislature can approve a referendum on establishing a casino in Newport only at the Newport Grand site. That referendum would go before the voters, in separate statewide and Newport-only votes, in the general election of 2016.

Thus the earliest possible date when Newport voters can vote for a casino with the assurance that it would not be moved from the Newport Grand site is in November 2016.

Are the potential buyers of Newport Grand willing to wait two and a half years?

This scarcely believable proposal to change the Rhode Island Constitution to limit a proposed casino to the Newport Grand site is nothing but a ploy to smooth the path for the gambling industry in Newport. I hope the Newport City Council will see through it.

Roland F. Chase, Newport

Npt. Daily News, 5/28/14