

## Casino and atheist issues may share a common theme

by Randy Bright <http://www.tulsabeacon.com/?p=5765>

Most of us here in the Tulsa area are aware of the controversial Red Clay Casino that is currently under construction in Broken Arrow, a suburb of Tulsa. The project came as a surprise to Broken Arrow residents who were unaware that the casino was going to be built, igniting a firestorm of protests.

On the Indian Country Today Media Network website, an article cited Fox News saying, “hundreds of church-goers lined the sidewalks surrounding the construction site of the Red Clay Casino in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma on Sunday, holding prayer cards and asking God to influence the Kiagee tribe to build something other than a casino.”

I’m entirely sympathetic with Broken Arrow residents who don’t want the casino in their community. Gambling is a very destructive behavior. I am personally aware of a retired individual who lost his entire life savings and who went on the public dole after going broke. Despite the fact that casinos provide jobs, the tradeoff between the good and the harm that they do hardly seems an even trade. We all know who the big losers and the big winners are.

I’m in favor of the protests against the casino and I am glad that there are still people of conscience who are brave enough to exercise their First Amendment rights in voicing their opinions and concerns. But the lawsuits to stop it?

Before I answer that question, let me share another perspective by citing two recent and ongoing cases, both of them initiated by the Freedom from Religion Foundation.

Admitted atheists, the FFRF has notified the city of Newland, North Carolina, that they must take down a display of the Ten Commandments from the Newland Town Hall. Citing their numbers (17,500 nationally and 400 in the state of North Carolina), and implying that the separation of church and state must be maintained, the FFRF seeks to prevent those who enter the town hall from being “confronted” by the display.

The FFRF has filed a lawsuit against the Flathead National Forest in Montana regarding a six-foot tall statue of Jesus that was placed there in 1954 by the Knights of Columbus. Citing their numbers again (17,500 nationally and 100 in Montana), the lawsuit claims that some people have “had direct and unwanted exposure to the shrine”, and that that violates the establishment clause of the Constitution.

At first the Forestry Service indicated that it would not renew the permit for the display, but after receiving more than 95,000 comments in favor of it, it decided to renew the permit for ten years. The American Center for Law and Justice and other Christian groups have lined up to assist with the defense of the Forestry Service in the lawsuit.

These three examples – the casino and the two FFRF cases – lead me to some observations. First of all, why would anyone want to build a casino? The obvious answer is for the money, but the real answer is that there is a demand for it. And if there is a demand for it, what does that say about the state of our society? What does it say about the hundreds of communities across this nation that have thriving casinos?

Second, our nation was founded as a Christian nation, and the Ten Commandments was a basis for our system of laws. Our religion gave us our moral bearings and has been instrumental in the creation and maintenance of an orderly society, so the response is to erase the Ten Commandments or any other Christian symbol from the public view? This is simply another example of “what the public sees, the public owns”.

Third, we allow a small group like the FFRF and others like it to lead the attacks, when most Americans claim to be Christians? Aren't they clearly outnumbered?

The real problem is not that there are attack groups like the FFRF or casino owners. It is that we have allowed loud and well-funded minorities to dilute our Christian values and the values of our government.

If all or most of America's Christians rejected the values of the hate groups or the casino owners, there would be no casinos because there would be no demand, and the lawsuits would never get any traction because they would never get public or judicial support. No one would feel offended or threatened by a statue of Jesus, the sight of a cross, or any other Christian symbol.

I am encouraged by the residents in Broken Arrow that have stood up for Christian and community values, and if lawsuits are necessary to prevent harm to the community, so be it. However, we should remember that in some communities, the construction of churches are being met with similar levels of protest, indicating that this is for the most part a spiritual problem with society.

Just something to think about.

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