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Open Letter to Deval Patrick on Casinos from Patrick Coordinators

Dear Governor Patrick:

We are Democrats who share a vision of a more equal, just, and democratic society. As Deval Patrick Volunteer Coordinators we supported your candidacy wholeheartedly and worked hard to help you secure the Democratic nomination and to put you in office.

Since becoming Governor you have undertaken many initiatives that make us proud to have been part of the Deval Patrick campaign. For example, we applaud the Municipal Partnership Act, and the proposal to require telephone companies to pay their fair share of property taxes.

But your proposal for resort casino gambling does not have our support. In fact, we are unequivocally opposed to it.

Early in the gubernatorial campaign you captured the essence of the argument for tax fairness. By reminding people that the discussion about “your money” is really a conversation about “your broken schools, your broken neighborhoods,” etc., you connected the dots. Many people (including those who had previously succumbed to the taxes-are-bad propaganda) listened and learned.

Eschewing the anti-tax rhetoric and providing instead a vision of a decent society, were hallmarks of our campaign; your message was authentic and honest. In addition, it was a major factor in persuading many of us to support and promote your candidacy.

Our campaign moved forward the debate about revenue sources and, perhaps more significantly, the wider debate about the common good. Victory in 2006 could have been the springboard into a meaningful statewide discussion about refashioning taxation so that it reflects and embodies our aspirations as a Commonwealth. For a brief moment, there was a chance to talk about restoring the income tax to its 2001 levels. There was even a chance to lead a conversation about establishing a progressive income tax. With the right leadership (including, but not necessarily limited to, your own) we may be able to revive that conversation.

The debate regarding casino gambling represents an opportunity to advocate for a more equitable tax system. After suffering a clear defeat in 2002, the opponents of the income tax have reemerged, putting their question back on the ballot. So, once again, those of us who share your vision are on the defensive, fighting a rearguard action to defend the very existence of the income tax. Instead we could have been taking the initiative and shaping the discourse.

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Given our desire to see realistic levels of public funding, why do we oppose resort casino gambling? Because we are Democrats. The platform of the Massachusetts Democratic Party commits the party to tax equity and responsible budgeting, special support for small businesses, sustainable development practices to foster economic stability for both urban and rural cities and towns, and the provision of a sustainable revenue source to finance state government that supports a healthy economy.

From what we observe in other states, casino gambling would not promote tax equity, responsible budgeting, sustainable development practices, or a sustainable revenue source, and likely would damage small businesses in Massachusetts. In short, it flies in the face of our party's principles.

Resort casinos are a mechanism for transferring money from poor and middle class people to wealthy corporations. Any revenue that leaks out to the state via taxation along the way is far short of the amount necessary to ameliorate the social and economic damage that the industry causes.

Resort casino gambling would involve our state government in condoning and encouraging behavior that has led in far too many cases to personal financial ruin, the breakup of families, domestic violence, and child neglect. In addition to these social costs, resort casinos draw money away from local restaurants, stores, and farms, compounding the injury. So presenting resort casino gambling as a source of revenue that would benefit our communities is misleading. The academically documented experiences of other states suggest that resort casinos damage, rather than boost, local economies.

We remain committed to showing leadership in our communities and in our Democratic town, ward, and city committees. Day after day, week after week, month after month, we make the case for tax equity. We are asking you to show leadership as well, by abandoning the resort-casino proposal and focusing instead on a cause that is both more ambitious and more promising—fair and progressive taxation.

Yours sincerely,

Judith Seelig, Pelham

Pat Fiero, Leverett

Tom Hollocher, Sudbury

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