



Civil War group's report blasts casino plan

By **TIM PRUDENTE** *The Evening Sun*

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An economic impact report stating casino officials "greatly exaggerated" job projections was released Thursday by a national preservation organization.

The Civil War Preservation Trust, which commissioned the report, has been a vocal opponent to the proposed Mason-Dixon Resort & Casino and, as a result, casino officials have called the new report slanted.

"This report is garbage and hopefully the Civil War Preservation Trust didn't spend too much of its members' funds on this absurd piece of fiction," said casino spokesman David La Torre.

But casino opponents have, in the past, stated the same about Mason-Dixon projections.

"I've been studying it and this report is much more reliable than the inflated promises of casino investors," said No Casino head Susan Star Paddock. "People have bought into this economic flimflam that there can be huge benefits without any costs. That doesn't exist in the real world."

The discrepancies between the two reports lie in the numbers.

The new 44-page report criticizes the projected number of jobs the casino would create. Mason-Dixon has projected about 900 "net new jobs" for Adams County. Of those, more than 500 will be

created indirectly, outside the casino, as money circulates through the area.

"These are just pie-in-the-sky figures that have no real basis," said Michael Siegel, who prepared the report. "It's a nice little piece of tap dancing that they did."

The remaining 375 projected jobs will be

full-time "equivalent" positions at the casino. These "equivalent" jobs are different than 40-hour per-week positions. In fact, it could mean several part-time positions that add up to make one full-time job, according to Siegel.

"These are not 375 full-time jobs at the casino," Siegel said. "It's a neat little trick. There's just no way you and I can know how many there will be."

The new report also predicts that the casino will cannibalize up to about 1,130 other jobs in Adams County.

"The applicant's economic impact assessment ignores any such adverse local impacts by employing a methodology that considers a job diverted to Mason-Dixon from an existing business to be a 'net new' job," according to the report.

But casino proponents disagree.

"Not a shred of evidence exists that Pennsylvania casinos cost people jobs in their communities," La Torre said. "Any rational person understands unemployment is at its highest in a generation and there are plenty of people who need work."

The new report also estimates area residents will gamble away \$776 per person which, when you

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include expenses for food and drink at the casino, among others, would amount to an annual diversion of about \$78.4 million from existing businesses in Adams County, according to the CWPT.

In contrast, the Mason-Dixon impact report estimated \$66 million in total net new and ongoing economic activity would be added to Adams County.

"Appropriate scrutiny shows the analysis performed by Mason-Dixon in support of its application to be insufficient and amateurish," said Civil War Preservation Trust President James Lighthizer.

But Michael Mariano, who worked on the Mason-Dixon impact report, said there's nothing to question.

"We stand by our work. We use industry-standard models which are issued by the federal government and from the Bureau of Economic Analysis," Mariano said.

Siegel also compared Gettysburg to the town of Vicksburg, Miss., a town dependant on heritage tourism that also contains casinos.

"About 40 percent of the downtown storefronts were shut down," said Siegel, who performed a sight tour of the downtown district to count the closed shops. "I went in March and there were stores that were chained and locked and didn't have a single light bulb. It was basically hollowed out."

Vicksburg Mayor Paul Winfield explained:

"To some extent, the dynamics of our downtown are unique in that a lot of these store fronts were mom and pop types that refused to upgrade their facilities and be consumer friends. Some have closed

but I can't attribute that to the casino industry.

"They make up one-fourth of our general fund," he said of the local casinos. "We bring in millions from them."

Siegel and a representative who worked on the Mason-Dixon impact report will both present their findings during the public hearing held by the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board.

The board will hold hearings to consider testimony on the plan of Gettysburg businessman David LeVan and partner Joseph Lashinger Jr. to add slot machines and tables games to an existing hotel about 0.8 miles from the battlefield.

Siegel is registered to speak on behalf of the Businesses Against the Casino group during the hearing. Although he admits he's not a member, he said the group was among several who funded his report and, as part of the contract, he will present the findings to the board.

Siegel has spent more than 32 years composing economic and fiscal impact reports and currently is the principal of Public and Environmental Finance Associates based in Washington, D.C., according to the report.

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IF YOU GO

The Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board will hold a public hearing Aug. 31 at the Comfort Suites hotel in Cumberland Township, located at 945 Baltimore Pike, Gettysburg.

The hearing will take place at 10 a.m. and PGCB

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officials will consider public testimony on the casino proposal of Gettysburg businessman David LeVan.

Written comments may also be submitted for the record prior to the hearing and up to 60 days after. The comments must be sent through the website, by fax to (717) 346-8350, or by mail to the PA Gaming Control Board at P.O. Box 69060, Harrisburg, PA 17106. Written comments should include "Attention: Board Secretary," on the front of the envelope, below the address.

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