

Madam Chair and members of the Senate Judiciary this bill isn't new. The Grand Forks community and the Turtle Mountain nation have been discussing this opportunity for two decades. I applaud Mayor Bochenski, Chairman Azure, and others in the room and online for pushing this again and I believe this is the closest they have ever been to making this High End Resort a reality. The project partners for this \$300 million resort are the City of Grand Forks, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and Caesars Entertainment. The casino would be owned by the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa and branded Harrah's. It has the potential to increase Grand Forks brand nationally and internationally, while supporting our local economy through increased tourism to the area and a boost to the local tax base.

Madam chair, it's no secret a casino will be a part of this development, but there is much more. This high-end resort, situated on 146 acres of Turtle Mountain owned land south of Grand Forks, will be a casino, hotel, spa, family entertainment complex, and convention center. It will consist of a 225-room hotel, spa, class 3 casino, 20,000 sq ft conference and banquet facility, 2,500-seat entertainment center, comedy club, pool, and gas station. It is estimated to draw 400,000 visitors from outside the local area, provide 800 jobs with a \$31.7 million annual payroll, and contribute another \$71.9 million to the economy of Grand Forks.

According to a 2022 economic impact study by the Innovation Group, “casino development increases room demand at non-casino hotels, even when casino hotels are built.” The study cited data from Shreveport, Louisiana, noting that occupancy in hotels not associated with a casino there went from approximately 60% prior to the casino’s opening to 74% a few years later.

I only mention the hotel occupancy rate increase to highlight how this would potentially impact the hotels in Grand Forks and how this will also help retail, restaurants, etc.

The bill that you have in front of you essentially amends Grand Forks County in subsection 5 of section 54-58-03 of the North Dakota Century Code dealing with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1998. This doesn't have an appropriation from the state, and the city and county aren't giving any incentives either.

Grand Forks and Turtle Mountain will need to finalize the terms of a Host Community Agreement with the expectation that the resort will pay taxes in the form of a PILOT (Payment in lieu of taxes). The local community estimates an impact of around \$1 million annually and the state fiscal impact is estimated at \$1.3 million, based off the same economic impact study referenced earlier. This will benefit the city, county, parks and the increased revenue should help with local property taxes. This same study estimates the tribe will see an estimated benefit of \$40 million, which will be used for tribal programs. There are representatives in the rooms that can discuss the benefits to their communities, how the home community agreement will work for taxes, involvement in the community, and how the charities will be involved with this development.

I know there are plenty of folks here looking to speak Madam Chair, but in closing I want to include the support of both the Grand Forks Chamber who cited a local market study which shows that Grand Forks is lacking attractions and amenities. And the Grand Forks Herald has come out in support of the project and in previous editorials have stated that Grand Forks needs more tourism, more visitors and more things for its residents to do.

There is local buy in for the project with signed a recently signed letter of intent by the Grand Forks City Council on Monday and a letter of support was approved by the Grand Forks County Commission yesterday. Finally, I also want to acknowledge Chairman Azure and others for their work on this project and their willingness to get this across the finish line.

I ask for a do pass and will stand for any questions.

Scott Meyer
Grand Forks, ND
District 18 State Senator