

January 21, 2014

The New York Times reports that the recent state wide referendum on the expansion of commercial casino gambling, which authorized as many as seven new full scale casinos, was approved with 57 percent of yes voters. But it did not pass in Saratoga Springs or in Saratoga County, as Saratoga Springs voted no by 57 percent and Saratoga County voted no by 54 percent. The Saratoga community, which hosts one of the three racetracks operated by NYRA, in addition to our own Belmont Park as well as Aqueduct Racetrack in South Ozone Park, was “thought to be a fait accompli – that the casino designated for the capital region would wind up in Saratoga – is no longer a sure thing, and much of that is because of a coordinated resistance from many residents and business owners.”

The growing grass roots opposition to commercialized casino gambling in Saratoga has been surprising to some, according to *The New York Times*’ revealing “Upstate, Opposition to a Casino is a Surprise” reported on January 12, 2014. According to *The New York Times*, local residents in Saratoga have formed a group, Saratogians Against Vegas-Style Expansion, or SAVE, which have been lobbying local politicians protesting against potential casino developers. Just as what has already been proclaimed by Floral Park concerning Belmont Park, many in Saratoga believe that the community “does not need or want a full-fledged casino.” Such a result, however, does not surprise us here in Floral Park.

In Floral Park, our opposition to the legalization of commercial gambling is even stronger than in Saratoga, with a roughly two to one no vote. A review of the vote on Long Island reveals that our Floral Park community was the only place where the gambling referendum went down to overwhelming defeat. Since Saratoga and Floral Park are both neighboring NYRA thoroughbred racing facilities, the message to Albany is loud and clear. The powers that be need to look to those communities that supported the gambling referendum to host one of the seven commercial casino gambling sites that have been authorized rather than the two places which have already been hosting pari-mutuel thoroughbred racing for well over a century.

It is not a coincidence that both Saratoga and Floral Park strongly defeated the recent referendum expanding commercial casino gambling in New York. Now that the communities in New York have all spoken on the issue, it is imperative that their wishes be acknowledged and respected by those responsible for selecting potential sites as one of the seven commercial casino gambling locations in New York. Obviously, Saratoga Springs and Belmont Park can immediately be scratched from the field of potential casino locations without further delay.