

November 7, 2011

This past week I had the rare opportunity to provide testimony to the members of the Long Island Development Council at one of two recently scheduled forums. Hofstra University President Stuart Rabinowitz is prominently quoted in his group's press release concerning their meetings that the "public participation process is crucial to our success!" It was therefore quite ironic and disappointing that Hofstra President Rabinowitz, who is co-chairman of the group which held the meeting at Molloy College in Rockville Centre, did not even bother to attend the meeting held just down the street from Hofstra. When given the opportunity to present as Floral Park's representative, I told the panelists that Floral Park has been a hosting community of Belmont Park; our 430 acre neighboring state owned property, since Belmont Park's opening Day in 1905. The panelists learned that Belmont Park is adjacent to one of our elementary schools as well as our junior and senior high school campus, with over a mile of peaceful residential neighborhoods separated by a fence. They learned how Floral Park proudly accepts the responsibility as a hosting community along with its associated burdens for over a century.

Some panelists nodded in recognition and some audience members chuckled concerning the fact our neighboring residents and students are close enough to enjoy the unique olfactory stimuli that emanate from the 2000 horse stables and to see and hear the encouraging yells of the jockeys training horses 365 days a year. Floral Park's testimony emphasized that Belmont Park is a year round operation that is home to residents in over 800 dormitories and is the heart of the over 17,000 jobs in the State of New York whose livelihood depend upon thoroughbred horse racing. Many in Floral Park work at Belmont Park and the last thing Floral Park wants to see is anything that threatens the positive, neighborly relationship we have had with Belmont Park for over 100 years. Sadly, the panel was told, some of the ideas apparently being discussed within the group may well destroy both Belmont Park and Floral Park as they peacefully coexist today.

It was again respectfully requested that Hofstra University President Rabinowitz step aside from the Long Island Development Council. The panel was reminded that Hofstra's leader has already taken a public position strongly against a casino where the Nassau Coliseum is located. In fact, Hofstra University's Senate and Full Faculty even have passed the following resolution:

Hofstra University has a responsibility to its students to provide a safe environment that is compatible with the mission of an institution of higher education. It strives to provide experiences that enrich its students as they develop through the formative years of their undergraduate education. Given the concentration of educational institutions in proximity to Nassau Coliseum we should not create an environment that fosters the further growth of compulsive gambling, a growing addiction in the United States, particularly among teenagers and young adults. Moreover, the University's ability to recruit new students depends, in part,

upon its ability to maintain its recognized standing as an educational institution of high quality located in a safe suburban setting.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY SENATE/FULL FACULTY OPPOSE THE LOCATION OF A CASINO OR GAMING FACILITY ON THE GROUNDS OF THE NASSAU COLISEUM.

While many audience members reacted positively to Floral Park's presentation, at least one audience member who works for Hofstra University apparently took great offence at our request that Hofstra's leader step aside from the panel. Hofstra's Vice President for Business Development was the last speaker at the forum and came to the defense of his school's leader, and even testified that Hofstra has not taken a position on whether or not Hofstra is opposed to a casino at the 77 acre Nassau Coliseum property, which is adjacent to Hofstra's 220 acre property on Hempstead Turnpike.

Now granted, we are not all graduates of Hofstra, but any sixth grader at the Floral Park Bellerose Elementary School neighboring Belmont Park could read Hofstra's resolution above and reasonably conclude that Hofstra does indeed "oppose the location of a casino or gaming facility on the grounds of the Nassau Coliseum." Hofstra's president also told the press, "We're not only opposed to a casino [near] Hofstra University, but we have every intention of fighting it," and "...If anybody thinks this is going to be less painful than negotiating between Wang and Hempstead, they're mistaken." [Newsday, June 12, 2010 entitled Is Casino Plan with Wang, Shinnecocks Possible?]

Once again Hofstra University President Rabinowitz should step aside from the Long Island Economic Development Council, and Hofstra University's representatives should apologize for providing such misleading and incorrect information to the very group Hofstra's president leads. If however, Hofstra now is in favor of a casino at the Hub near the Nassau Coliseum, we would be pleased to support Hofstra in that position.