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Slots Referendum Passes Easily

Excerpted

November 3, 2010

ANNAPOLIS, MD - The high stakes, low-down battle over slots at Arundel Mills Mall ended last night on the same emotional note that marked the seemingly endless campaign.

Anne Arundel County gave a strong edge to backers of the casino by a margin of 56 percent to 44 percent. The vote appears to finally clear the way for Baltimore developer David Cordish to build the 47-hundred and 50-slot casino in the mall parking lot.

Joe Weinberg, president of the Cordish company, attributed the strong win to appeal of more than 30 million dollars in tax revenue and 4,000 jobs the casino promises to bring into the county. He said he also believes most voters concluded they wouldn't find a better location.

"It's really about the jobs and the revenues. And I think there was also a realization that Arundel Mills is the absolute ideal location for this type of facility. While of course there is a residential community nearby, Arundel Mills is a commercial district. And I think everybody really came to the realization that if you can't put it at Arundel Mills, you can't put it anywhere."

The vote was another sharp blow for the Maryland Jockey Club. The owner of Laurel and Pimlico racetracks failed in its own bid for slots and was hoping to block nearby competition.

Jockey Club President Tom Chuckas predicted the defeat could mean the end of live racing at Laurel. The Maryland Racing Commission may take up the issue before the end of this year.

"The citizens, the voters of the county have spoken. I think that

for 2010, we'll continue as we are, but I think in 2011 you're going to see some changes."

The strain of the fight was particularly evident on the casino opponents from communities near the mall. A couple dozen or so returned from a day of poll working crestfallen but still clinging to hope.

Here's a young poll worker named Carla on her way into the No-Slots-at-the-Mall election night party in the Dorchester Community Center.

"Where I was, the location that I was, it was a 50-50. Unfortunately, a lot of the opposition, those for slots at Arundel Mills, were given misleading information. It was a dirty fight, unfortunately. So, I was called a liar, I was booed today. So, I'm ready to get in there and celebrate."

The referendum fight was launched by mall neighbors. But it ultimately became a six million-dollar advertising war between two gaming giants.

David Cordish got a lot of financial help from the company that owns the mall, which kicked in at least two million dollars to help in the referendum fight.

The big money financing the neighbors' campaign of resistance came from the Maryland Jockey Club and its partner, Penn-National, one of the largest gaming companies in the country.

So, the stakes were very high, but it looks like Cordish has finally hit the jackpot.