

Mayor Morse's Statement 12/13/12

Late last month, I announced a change in my strategy to address the reality of a casino coming to our region. Since that announcement, I have come to recognize the flaws of such strategy. It has become increasingly clear that pursuing this conversation will only be a distraction from my administration's broader economic goals, and I regret not realizing this fact sooner.

Today, I am halting all consideration of casino development in the City of Holyoke, and the City will be returning the grants provided by both gaming proponents to review their projects. I have decided not to pursue a host agreement for a project of this type in the City of Holyoke. A casino may be coming to our area, but it will not be coming here.

I admit that the potential benefits such as prime recreational opportunities available on and around Mt. Tom and the possibility of revenue to be gained from a casino to be invested downtown piqued my interest – as did the reality that a casino down the road would have negative effects on Holyoke and other surrounding communities. But over the past weeks I have done a lot of listening: I have heard from colleagues; I have heard from friends; I have heard from leaders from other cities that faced similar circumstances; and, above all, I have heard from the citizens I serve. And I now realize that the allure of these short-term economic benefits are not worth a protracted exercise that would divert us and cause me to lose sight of the values that got me elected.

Our City cannot afford to be diverted by this conversation. At a time when our community needs unity of purpose, a yearlong debate over locating a casino within our borders will only sow division and discord. In retrospect, I should have foreseen this sort of division, and I apologize for introducing it. Initiating this process was a mistake and I accept that responsibility.

My election last year signaled the direction in which the people of Holyoke wanted our City to move – and that was toward an economy based on creativity, innovation, and technology. I remain committed to continuing along that path. If the unanimous City Council vote on our City's new Urban Renewal Plan is indicative, then there are tremendous successes our City can achieve by seeking and finding common ground. Moving forward, the question of how to best address the negative impacts of a casino in surrounding communities like ours will remain on my agenda. I plan to continue speaking with neighboring mayors, and listen for further input from Holyoke's citizens. At the state level, we will pursue a "surrounding community" designation, which will enhance our mitigation efforts. I will do all I can to secure both revenue and jobs for Holyoke throughout this process.

Now, more than ever, I recognize how complicated the work of good governance can be. I have learned from this experience. Ultimately, I hope to build on this humbling moment and to become a better mayor as a result. We still have much work before us, and I am grateful that by listening, and with your support, I am now back on track.