

OPINION

The Source

4A
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Gazette opinion

Key vote on COTs' future set Monday

The future of Montana's two-year colleges will be on the House Appropriations Committee agenda Monday morning. The committee is scheduled to take a vote on House Bill 540, which proposes bond funding that would allow colleges of technology in Billings, Great Falls and Helena to meet growing demands for workforce training.

We reaffirm our endorsement of the COT bonds. Montana State University-Billings College of Technology and the other COTs are key to educating Montanans for high-demand skilled jobs. Montana lags behind virtually all other states in its investment and enrollment in two-year colleges, although the majority of new jobs require post-secondary training that is a two-year degree or less.

A broad coalition of legislators from across Montana has signed on to co-sponsor House Bill 540, which was introduced by Rep Sue Dickenson of Great Falls. The measure's next hurdle is the Appropriations Committee, which must vote to send it to the House floor. We encourage all Gazette readers who care about improving higher education to ask committee mem-

Take action

To contact legislators, call the Legislative Information Service at (406) 444-4800 and leave a message for up to five individual legislators per call. Messages also may be sent via e-mail through the legislative Web site: www.state.mt.us/session.htm.

Members of the House Appropriations Committee are: Chairwoman Rosie Buzzas, Vice Chairwoman Carol Juneau, Vice



Indian gaming splits G along business, moral

WASHINGTON — House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's ethics troubles threaten more than his own political future. They have the potential to create a much wider scandal over lobbying on the Indian gambling issue and to open a rift among socially conservative Republicans.

For now, much of the public attention focuses on DeLay's connections with lobbyist Jack Abramoff's efforts to protect Indian gambling interests. The Washington Post reported on Saturday that DeLay, a Texas Republican, took a trip to Britain in 2000 that was largely financed by two of Abramoff's clients, the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and eLottery Inc.

Republicans are alarmed that



E.J. Dionne Jr.

the Jenas. To get the job done, Reed worked with his fellow evangelical James Dobson.

The result: Reed, a public opponent of the spread of casinos, profited from a battle between Indian gambling interests. Reed has insisted that in opposing

Republicans' regulation of often allied who are skeptical of personal be Indian casino: multicultural Indian gambli new industr opportunity impoverished with their lo American into the tribes.

Abramoff's the source of l argue succes tribes that Republican allies now the dominant in doing so. Abr

panel convenes at 8 a.m. Monday.

The Joint Long Range Planning Subcommittee unanimously approved HB540 a month ago. That

bipartisan committee recommended \$40.5 million in bonds for University System projects, including \$9 million for expanding and renovating the MSU-Billings COT, \$7.5 million for the Helena COT, \$9 million for a new building at Montana Tech in Butte, \$11 million for the Great Falls COT, \$3.5 million for renovations at MSU in Bozeman and \$500,000 for upgrading agriculture experiment stations.

HB540 also would provide a state share of funding for two larger water projects that have to get most of their funding from the federal government. The St. Mary water project would rebuild a failing Hi-Line system, which provides water for Havre and other communities. The Fort Belknap project is necessary to meet the state's legal obligation under the Fort Belknap Water Rights Settlement, which affects the Milk River. HB540 proposes \$19.5 million total for the two water projects.

And finally, the bill, as approved by the Long Range Planning Committee, includes \$7.5 million toward buying the Capitol Hill Mall to house the Montana Historical Society. The society proposes to raise additional private funds to complete that project.

Investment in the colleges of technology is critical. At MSU-Billings COT, enrollment has increased 79 percent since 2000 and every lab is full. Montana employers need the refinery workers, automotive mechanics, computer technicians and health-care professionals trained at the COT.

We call on members of the Appropriations Committee to recommend HB540 as an important long-term investment in Montana's economy.

Hiner, Verdell Jackson, Joey Jayne, Christine Kaufmann, Ralph Lenhart, Walt McNutt, Penny Morgan, John Musgrove, Rick Ripley, Jon Sesso, John Sinrud, Janna Taylor and Jack Wells.

pushed through by the House Republican leadership making it harder to investigate and discipline ethics lapses by members of Congress. The Democrats' strategy will be to put pressure on moderate Republicans to break with DeLay and enact tougher standards.

Business and morals

But the larger controversy lies beneath the surface. It involves a collision between the business interests of Republican lobbyists and the moral commitments of the party's large wing of social conservatives who strongly oppose the spread of gambling.

Perhaps the most bizarre example of this contradiction was detailed by Post reporter Susan Schmidt. When one Louisiana tribe, the Jena Band of Choctaws, won initial approval of a casino three years ago, another tribe, the Louisiana Coushatta, hired Abramoff to block the potential competition. Abramoff and an associate, in turn, paid \$4 million to Ralph Reed, a Republican consultant and evangelical leader, to organize local anti-gambling sentiment against

his fees came from gambling proceeds, though he does acknowledge that he knew of Abramoff's connection to the tribes.

Even before the rise of the Native American casinos, the gambling issue regularly gave rise to strange-bedfellows politics. Opponents of the proliferation of casinos have included some of the most liberal Democrats and some of the most conservative Republicans. Liberals see gambling interests as preying on the less well-to-do, and argue that the growing dependence of state and local governments on revenue connected to gambling is a cop-out by politicians unwilling to finance government programs through general tax increases.

Social conservatives also speak of gambling as "a tax on the poor," but their core objection is the old-fashioned moral assertion that it is simply wrong. And both liberals and conservative gambling foes have argued that the spread of casinos has a corrupting effect on politics because so much money is at stake.

Supporters of legal gambling are an equally motley crew. Economically libertarian

Republican v opposition to t bling has been causes in Cong

Casino wealth

Shortly after settling strong and pushing reform in Indian gambling "a tainted revenue massive revenue the gambling industry well-connected worst of all, c for most Native

Last year, urged the Justice investigate with tribes Abram were the victims

Wolf has named DeLay, an ally a friend. But Wolf gambling is she conservatives find it surprising those whom allies are profit try they see as

E.J. Dionne postchat@aol.

Voice of the real

Social Security based on individual, societal benefits

Writing in "Social Security" (page 9, McCahan, 1975), Robert J. Myers said: "Whenever a social security system involves contributions from the potential beneficiaries, the question of individual equity versus social adequacy arises. Individual equity means that the contributor receives benefit protection directly related to the amount of his contributions. ... Social adequacy means that the benefits paid will provide for all contributors a certain standard of living."

Recently my daughter graduated from college and started a new job. Yeah! If during the first decade of her probable four or five decade working career she contributed her starting salary Social Security taxes into an account that earned a rate of return equal to the worst 40-year period of an actual 68-year fund, she would accumulate \$2,357,470 (\$668,020 in 2005 dollars) at her retirement in 2052. Individual equity in action.

Another close relative of mine has received thousands of dollars more than was contributed to Social Security; the internal rate of return on contributions made in

relation greater od of th adequa To s than th To beli and soc to some all Soci torical been p sides c work t ments.

Mallard Fillmore



By Bruce Tinsley

Doonesbury

