

Our View: Casino backer's spin doctors shilling a bad bet for Mainers

Written by Administrator
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In about three months, Mainers will decide whether to endorse on a casino in York County, and persuading them to vote “yes” is the task of Goddard Gunster, a top-tier Washington consulting firm that’s been brought on board to tout the casino campaign. But while the firm’s fact-free strategy worked to put Brexit over the top, Maine voters shouldn’t ignore the mounting evidence that this ethically dubious initiative is a singularly bad bet.

Goddard Gunster’s operatives have a 90 percent referendum success rate, Maine Public Radio [reported](#) Thursday, but given the Maine casino campaign’s negative image, they’ll have to work hard to maintain it.

The self-serving nature of the proposal — if approved, the casino could be licensed only to gambling industry player Shawn Scott — has been the focus of negative headlines. So have complaints about the [deceptive and aggressive tactics](#) used during the first, failed ballot drive. Now the campaign is mired in a [Maine Ethics Commission probe](#) into allegations that it’s been hiding its funding sources.

Goddard Gunster, however, knows how to deal with information that reflects badly on its clients. “What they said early on was ‘facts don’t work’ and that’s it. ... You have got to connect with people emotionally,” Arron Banks, the British multimillionaire who bankrolled the campaign for Britain to leave the European Union, [told](#) The Independent.

So Brexit backers told voters that leaving the EU would free up 350 million pounds a week for the National Health Service. (Not true, one of the chief architects of the campaign, Nigel Farage, [admitted](#) after the vote.) Regarding another hot-button issue, they said that ending free movement across the border would allow Britain to admit only high-skilled immigrants. (That’s fantasy, [according to](#) economist Jonathan Portes of the respected National Institute of Economic and Social Research.)

But the voters obviously related more to Michael Gove: Asked before the vote to cite one independent economic authority who supported Brexit, Gove, then the country’s justice minister, [snapped](#) , “I think people in this country have had enough of experts.”

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No doubt, a similarly evidence-free campaign in favor of the York County casino is already being mapped out. But even the best-honed spin doctoring can't disguise the fact that there are no grounds to believe the casino will benefit anyone but Shawn Scott and his closest cronies. Maine voters should be too smart to buy what Goddard Gunster is selling.

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