

In the fractious political environment in America today, it's difficult to imagine that there might be a single issue on which those from the far left, the far right and the center might agree. There is, however: fighting the pernicious attempts of certain corporations, whether large or small, to entice the government into rigging the free market in their favor. This is crony capitalism, and it's what happens when people manipulate democracy to benefit their own pocketbook rather than society at large.

Liberals, conservatives and moderates should all oppose crony capitalism because it's detrimental to all of their causes. Fundamentally, it's the most blatant example of big government run amok that you'll ever find, which should absolutely infuriate conservatives of all stripes (unless they're benefiting from it somehow).

It takes funds away that could be spent on other things — whether that's health care, national security, education or tax cuts — and instead sends it into some well-connected businessman's bank account. It's a prime example of irresponsible, unethical government designed to benefit the powerful few, and that should be offensive to all of us, regardless of ideology.

Sadly, it's all too easy to find examples of crony capitalism in this country, at the local, state and federal levels. One of the most obnoxious examples in other states is billionaire team owners asking for public subsidies to build stadiums for their millionaire athletes.

Here in Maine, we're lucky enough to have team owners who are more interested in giving back to the community than taking from it. That doesn't mean we're immune from crony capitalism, however. Just this past session, we've let gigantic corporations from away write regulations for fantasy sports; in years past, we spent taxpayer dollars bailing out railroads that ended up going bankrupt anyway.

This year, though, we have the opportunity to vote down crony capitalism at the ballot box directly for a change. Usually, these types of deals are written behind closed doors in the dead of night, and voters aren't given any kind of say. This deal was written in secret, too, but instead of trying it to ram it through the Legislature, the authors of the York County casino referendum hope to hoodwink the public instead.

## Jim Fossel: The York County casino referendum is pure crony capitalism

Written by Administrator

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Now, it's important to understand that the referendum doesn't allow just anyone to open a casino in York County. It doesn't establish a neutral, open bidding process, as should be the case, nor does it simply legalize gambling and allow anyone to open a casino. Instead, it restricts who can open the casino in such a limited way that only one person, casino developer Shawn Scott, would qualify.

The Legislature, of course, would never have approved this ridiculous plan if the proposal had been brought to them first. That's probably why supporters decided to go the referendum route instead.

Writing a law specifically to allow one person to make a profit isn't good governance, and it isn't good business practice, either. Getting the government to rewrite laws solely to let one person make a profit is dishonest, misleading and manipulative, and the people of Maine deserve better. If we're going to have a debate about further expansion of casino gaming, it ought to be done in an open, fair way through the normal legislative process, not written by lawyers to benefit one particular person.

As soon as this campaign is over, the Legislature should work together in a bipartisan fashion to put in place some kind of reasonable regulatory structure for casinos in Maine. After all, now that two full-scale casinos are already operating in the state, the debate over whether to allow gambling at all is pretty much over. Indeed, it was over long before that, with the state enthusiastically lapping up all the tax revenue it could from the lottery. If the Legislature provides for greater oversight of the gambling industry in Maine, perhaps we can finally put these endless casino referendums to rest.

In the meantime, Mainers of all ideological stripes should vote to reject this particular casino. Whether you're for gambling or against it, don't let this monstrosity pass. This isn't just about gambling, or about jobs and the economy — it's about defending the integrity of our democracy, especially our citizen initiative process. We've shown before that Maine values can defeat big out-of-state funding efforts for referendums.

Let's come together this fall and do it again, proving to the rest of the country that our democracy in this state isn't simply for sale to the highest bidder.

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*Jim Fossil, a conservative activist from Gardiner, worked for Sen. Susan Collins. He can be contacted at: [\[email protected\]](#)*

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