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ThePostEditorials

Colleges deserve gambling money

The Colorado Historical Society has a claim to a fraction of the new revenue, but the focus should be on community colleges.

It should come as no surprise that given the lousy economy and plummeting state revenues, lots of folks are casting a covetous eye toward one of the few new state revenue sources — gambling money.

We hope Colorado lawmakers take action to ensure the money goes where voters intended, and resist the temptation to earmark the money or fiddle with funding formulas.

The problem, as it were, began in November when voters overwhelmingly approved allowing the state's three gambling towns to raise betting limits to \$100 a hand and extend hours, which is expected to significantly boost the state's taxable take.

Amendment 50 spelled out where the new, additional tax money was to go: 78 percent to community colleges and 22 percent to gaming communities. It should be noted that the new money is distinct from the gambling taxes collected since Colorado voters approved gaming in 1990.

However, the devil has emerged in the details of divvying up the new revenue.

It gets very complicated very fast, but the original pot of money, the pre-Amendment 50 money, included a sizeable slice for historic preservation. While they will still get their percentage, a dispute has arisen between community college officials and historic preservation folks over the definition of additional tax revenues attributable to new betting limits and hours.

And they differ over the precise

calculation of who gets what slice of the pie.

House Bill 1272 was introduced in the state legislature this week to establish rules for how the amendment will work.

We think it fairly reflects the intent of Amendment 50 and will ensure that a lion's share of the new gambling money will go to shore up community colleges, which are seeing sizeable enrollment increases but getting less state money.

We also understand how difficult a position the Colorado Historical Society finds itself in. The society is a non-profit agency and a state institution that operates 12 historic sites and museums around the state. It is in the thick of trying to build a new Colorado History Museum, a project estimated at \$112 million.

With the state contemplating shutting down prisons and mental health facilities, prospects for funding are difficult, to say the least.

On top of that, gaming revenue, a prime source of money for preservation and the new museum, has decreased with the down economy. So we understand why historic preservation people might be looking to get a bigger slice of gambling money.

Regardless of how sympathetic the cause, state legislators ought to ensure the enabling legislation fairly apportions money to community colleges. Clearly, that is what voters intended when they approved extended gaming.