

# A modest proposal: Create a tax free Indian casino in Manhattan

**Mike Hudson**

Fifty acres is a lot of land, some 2,420,000 square feet, roughly the size of five football fields including the end zones. In Niagara Falls we ought to know. That was pretty much how big our downtown was before some geniuses in Albany decided to give it to the Seneca Nation of Indians.

Most of the people involved in that swindle are gone now: former governor George Pataki to a well deserved obscurity, former state Senate leader Joe Bruno to a possible prison sentence, and former state representative Francine Del Monte to exactly the sort of political purgatory a career hack such as herself was asking for most of her adult life.

A couple still remain, including Niagara Falls Mayor Paul Dyster – a cheerleading councilman in 2001 when the deal went down – and state Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, who hasn't talked much about the Seneca deal since he helped ram it down our throats a decade ago.

For the Senecas, the whole thing worked out great. They got their tax-free casino and hotel complex, and the demolished enough private businesses and residences seized for them by the state under its odious eminent domain laws that they can now grow enough corn – or maize, as the Native Americans refer to it – to feed the entire Turtle Clan should a bad winter descend on the Seneca's traditional hunting grounds.

They proved to be, well, Indian givers as well, and now owe the nearly bankrupt city of Niagara Falls more than \$58 million they said they'd pay but then decided they'd rather not.

Dyster and Silver, who championed the deal 10 years ago, have remained pretty much silent on the prospect of the city ever collecting on this massive debt, remembering all too well the fate of Gen. George Armstrong Custer at the Little Bighorn in 1876.

Dyster's already been punished enough. He got re-elected as mayor.

As for Shelly Silver, he's pretty much gotten away with it. He gave away 50 acres of the most valuable property in one of the most famous cities in the state he's sworn a solemn oath to protect and defend; gave it away to a foreign nation as alien as Uruguay, and yet he hasn't gone to prison, hasn't faded into obscurity, hasn't lost his job or his respect or his leadership position in Albany.

Clearly it's time for some payback, and we'd like to put forth a modest proposal.



*A modest proposal. If carving out 50 acres in downtown Niagara Falls to create a tax free sovereign nation to compete against over-taxed American businesses was good, consider how much better it would be if New York state created a 50 acre tax-free sovereign nation in Manhattan. The people there would very likely love it as much as we do here.*

As he has since 1977, Shelly represents the 64th State Assembly District, a garden spot on the Lower East Side of Manhattan that was pretty low rent back when he took office but has blossomed and prospered in the decades since.

He wouldn't think of giving any of it to the Indians. His friends, those politically and financially well-heeled denizens of the trendy boutiques and upscale dining establishments along Clinton Street's restaurant row, would never speak to him again if he handed over their hangouts to, say, the Poospatuck Nation of Indians currently consigned to the ghetto of Suffolk County, Long Island.

Where would Yonah Shimmel make his knishes if not for the bakery on Houston Street and where would one get a salami to send their boy in the Army if not for Katz's Deli a few blocks down? Gus' Pickles, Kossar's Bialys, all would become endangered species should, say, state Sen. George Maziarz propose giving 50 acres of the

Lower East Side to the impoverished Poospatuck.

The reservation is the smallest in New York State. It is located in Mastic on the north side of Poospatuck Creek, on the east side of Poospatuck Lane, and south of Eleanor Avenue. Poospatuck is situated in the southeast corner of the Suffolk County Town of Brookhaven.

Although the law allows only Indians connected to the reservation to buy tax-free cigarettes, non-Indian smokers find out that they can buy cigarettes tax-free on the reservation and smuggle them into NYC.

The reservation is recognized by the state of New York, but not by the Bureau of Indian Affairs—an important difference in the all important debate over Indian casino gaming.

As of the 2000 census, there were 271 people, 93 households, and 67 families living in poverty on the Poospatuck Indian reservation. The median income for a household in the Indian reservation is \$13,125, and the median income for a family is \$17,500. That would barely buy 1,000 delicious pastrami sandwiches at Katz's Deli and, as good as they are, imagine a family trying to live on that.

As it happens, the reservation is



*Don't hold your breath waiting for Sheldon Silver (above) to approve a Tax-free casino in Manhattan.*

but 55 acres, and a swap for 50 acres in Lower Manhattan seems fair to us. Shelly Silver's constituents can then benefit from all the largesse he's lavished on the good people of Niagara Falls – a casino to take their money, zero revenue from property taxes and cheap smokes – along with the pride of ownership you feel owning a special, one-of-a-kind jewelry item, sculpture or garment from the Poospatuck Trading Company.

Perhaps they would show their gratitude to him by continuing to send him back to Albany again and again. Or maybe not.

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