

# Albany, along with Seneca, is killing the town

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Niagara Falls, N.Y., is a world-famous town and it's broke. That's ironic since Niagara Falls, Ontario; Niagara Falls, Seneca; and Niagara Falls, Albany (ie. the State Park) are rich.

Of course, Niagara Falls, Ontario, has support from its provincial government. They know in Toronto — Ontario's capital city — that Niagara Falls is a world attraction. If it looks beautiful, more tourists will come and spend money in their province. In Ontario, the big city (Toronto) makes sure the little city, Niagara Falls, and its tourist district, looks beautiful.

Niagara Falls, Seneca — that 50-acre country with its tax-free hotel, tax-free souvenir, gift and clothing stores, tax-free restaurants and monopoly casino — also looks good. Under Albany it was created: Not on historic Indian reservation, but, uniquely, on U.S. land smack down in the middle of Niagara Falls, given away to a foreign nation to compete tax-free against tax-paying Americans. Seneca came amongst us, destined to be above our laws: No taxes to pay, and, when they build, no requirement to comply with costly N.Y. building codes.

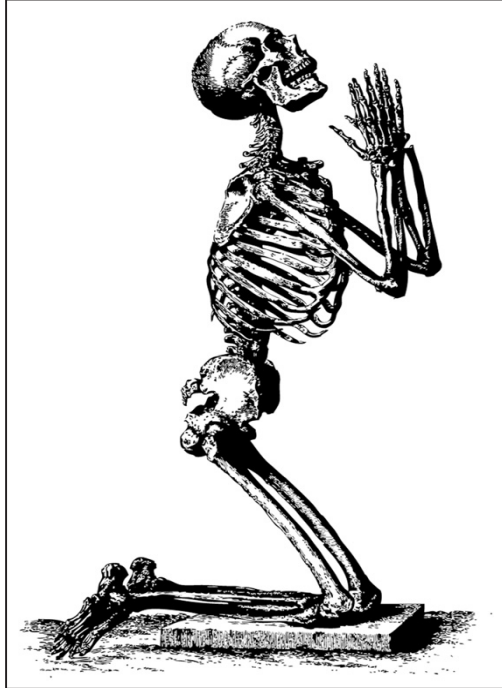
True, Seneca pays a percentage to Albany on slot machine revenues, but they pay nothing on other business or other gaming enterprises. Some slot revenue, however, does trickle down to Niagara Falls. Yet it is far less than what would've been realized if America, instead of Seneca, had a casino, giant hotel and dozens of profitable stores.

So why does a "Sovereign Nation" make more than \$350 million annually from gaming while we struggle to keep libraries open and our children from leaving Western New York? Because Albany ruled: Gambling is evil. Its profits are predicated on the losses of others — oftentimes from foolish, the temporarily insane — but sometimes hardworking people who sometimes ruin their families and place society in jeopardy by believing in dumb luck. Gambling, since 1821, has been banned by state constitution.

Albany, nevertheless, gave U.S. land to a tiny, foreign nation, the Seneca Nation of Indians, population 7,300, so that Americans could go onto foreign soil — which used to be American soil — and gamble, constitution or not. Seneca would profit, Albany would profit.

To sell it locally, Albany claimed Seneca would spur "spin-off" development. As "host community," locals would also get 25 percent of what Albany got. But locals pay 100 percent for the privilege: Land ceded to a foreign nation is property tax-free; items that used to generate sales tax are purchased sales tax-free. Still, locals pay for roads/infrastructure that lead to Seneca; and locals pay for increased criminal justice and social welfare costs associated with casino-fueled gambling addiction. And Seneca businesses also compete, tax-free, against (according to CNNMoney.com) the second high-taxed place in the USA.

It's economics 101: The transfer of wealth — Seneca is gleaming, while more than two dozen American businesses collapsed. Four hotels closed. The ice



## NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y.

skating rink closed. The Convention Center lost. The area adjacent to Seneca plunged deeper into desolation.

And "spin-off"? That glistening Seneca-Niagara Hotel "spin-off" simply "spins" Niagara Falls' hotel business away from U.S. hotels off to a tax-free hotel on Indian Territory.

Shockingly, the Seneca/Albany compact provides for acquiring additional, adjacent land — to remove from the USA — for more tax-free Seneca businesses. Already, Seneca has opened a buffet, a pub, a "high-end" steakhouse, an Italian restaurant, an Asian restaurant, a glamour spa, a conference center, a bistro, a coffee shop, a nightclub, numerous souvenir and gift shops, and a 26-story, 604-room hotel. More stores are coming. A smoke shop is anticipated, and a gas station and a mall.

Still, Albany wants us to think Seneca is having positive impact. True, slot revenues generate millions for Albany, annually (to aid New York City) and \$72 million was paid to locals in payroll. Yet the latter was paid mainly in hourly divisions near minimum wage. And studies suggest that for every job created by a casino, at least one regional job is lost. There aren't more jobs, just more of us working under Seneca.

Meantime, to pay for these jobs, an estimated \$600 million in gambling losses came out of locals' pockets, people who sometimes gambled with more than entertainment money. There have been suicides, divorce, bankruptcy, fraud, drug sales and hospitalized gambling addiction associated with the casino and, it is said Seneca, glad to extend collateralized credit like many casinos, holds hundreds of mortgages on customers' houses.

Thus, besides impoverishing thousands of local people smitten with the idea of chancing hard-earned cash for the lure of too-fast wealth, millions in sales tax and property tax have been lost. Lost, also, was important convention business. As readers know, Albany gave Seneca our convention center, which generated millions for local hoteliers and restaurateurs. Now that the lure of a convention in famed Niagara is gone, they are not choosing Buffalo as runner-up city. All-told, regional losses add up to billions.

Still, some people say "we" stole Niagara



## ALBANY, N.Y.

Falls from poor Seneca. It's right that we give it back. But it was actually the "Neutrals," a peace-loving Indian tribe that occupied Niagara Falls until the mid-18th century, when Seneca came and wiped them out. Seneca occupied the Falls briefly before Karma caught up and the Europeans threw them off. Whenever someone says Seneca deserves Niagara Falls, I really think the Neutrals deserve it since they had it first.

Yet should every conquered nation get their land back? That would mean America ought to give this country back to the British. My ancestors, fortuitously, were, innocently, in Italy when Seneca and European atrocities occurred. How guilty should I feel? Not enough to believe Seneca should have preferences over me.

But Seneca does: It has a tax-free business zone, a gambling monopoly and sympathy. It's a peculiarity of Niagara Falls, N.Y., that we don't understand history: Seneca or Niagara.

History: A small, famous city in one part of N.Y. and a large, famous city on the other end — N.Y.C. — spells "disaster" to the small city. Albany brokers tax money and, because N.Y.C. has more votes, N.Y.C. gets the advantage. As an example: We lost our Niagara hydro-power when the Albany-run power authority took control 50 years ago. We had the lowest electric rates in the USA. Fifty years later, we have the third-highest in America — and N.Y.C. gets our low-cost power.

Then there's the Niagara Falls State Park. Albany usurped our natural wonder — the most visited state park in the USA, calling it an "Olmsted Park," after Frederick Law Olmsted who designed it. But, according to Olmsted's careful plan, there was to be one rest stop in the entire park; no manmade gardens, fountains, statues or stores; no paid parking; nothing to buy, nothing manmade, just hand-hewn paths through verdant hemlock, beech and maple. The whole park absolutely green with a stunning surprise at the end, heard before it was seen: Niagara Falls.

The adjacent city would thrive, too, by having the natural, healing and wondrous adventure free for the world to see. Outside the park, all the stores and shops that would accommodate the millions of awe-inspired tourists would be owned by local people. Instead,

Albany ordered the trees felled and the park is a succession of paid parking lots, souvenir stores and restaurants, which deprive the city of much of the economic boon associated with having a world attraction within one's boundaries.

Every dollar spent in the park is not spent in the city. It is, de-facto, spent in Albany and ultimately winds up in N.Y.C. In spite of Albany's boast, the Niagara Falls State Park is not an "Olmsted" park.

And, perhaps, not coincidentally, the city of Niagara Falls is not a prosperous tourist town. It became the first place in history to where the millions come that became a ghost town. Surprisingly, across the river is a boom town with the same name.

Instead of becoming rich from overflowing tourism, downtown businesses compete with the state park's tax-free parking, stores and restaurants, Seneca's tax-free stores, hotels and restaurants, and Niagara Falls, Canada, government-beautified restaurants, stores and hotels.

Some wonder why Niagara Falls is a barren town: Thanks to Albany, there's a lot of poverty, and injustice, in Niagara Falls, N.Y.

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