

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

COALITION PRESSES FOR GREATER ACCESS TO EVERETT CASINO JOBS

By Colin A. Young
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STATE HOUSE, BOSTON, MARCH 29, 2016.....Calling themselves the Action Casino Network, a coalition of groups representing communities of color rallied Tuesday in pursuit of greater access to the 8,000 jobs expected to come with the \$1.7 billion resort casino planned for Everett.

"It would mean a lot to our families, particularly to people of color, to have access to the construction and permanent jobs at the casino," said Antonio Amaya, director of La Comunidad Inc. in Everett. "We want the state, the Gaming Commission and Wynn Resorts to work with us to remove any and all obstacles so our community members will have access to good, unionized jobs."

For design and construction work, Wynn Resorts has committed to a goal of 15.3 percent of all work hours going to minority workers, 6.9 percent of work hours going to women, and 3 percent of the hours going to veterans, but the Action Casino Network said those benchmarks are not high enough.

Pointing to an objective stated in Wynn's diversity plan that calls for the resort casino company to "develop a workforce that reflects the diversity of the region," the group said the target ought be closer to 40 percent to reflect the percentage of people of color in the Boston area.

Also among the obstacles to access, the group said, is the Legislature's approval of a project labor agreement for the Everett casino project.

"Many of the construction workers of our community are non-union, given our historical exclusion from the unions," Priscilla Flint-Banks, vice president of the Black Economic Justice Institute, said. "Yet the project labor agreement gives control over the project to union contractors, creating obstacles for the majority of our companies in our communities attempting to secure contracts."

The coalition called upon the building trade unions to accept additional new apprentices each month, to set goals for admission of women and people of color, and to provide information on present membership to allow for effective diversity planning.

The group, rallying support on the front steps of the State House, said its focus is not just on the planned Wynn casino and hopes to meet with Gov. Charlie Baker and legislators to avoid similar obstacles for future building projects.

"Boston is boasting right now -- boasting -- the most construction it has ever had in the history of its existence. Yet we still have high levels of unemployment in certain areas of our city," Brother Lo, executive director of the Black Economic Justice Institute, said. "That's not right, and we're tired of it."

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03/29/2016

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