

## BACKGROUND:

Despite repeated voter rejections of casino development in Maine, a group of Maine business investors proposed building and operating a four-season casino resort facility in 2009. The Maine Legislature upheld past practices and determined the issue would be decided by a statewide referendum in the November 2010 general election. The investors chose the town of Oxford as their host community, formed a PAC (Maine Taxpayers Taking Charge) and hired Cindy Eid to run their campaign.



I was hired during the final months of the campaign to replace the resignation of another professional communications consultant.

## CHALLENGES:

- During the previous decade, Maine voters overwhelmingly rejected similar proposals in both local and statewide elections.
- Focus groups revealed that casinos were generally perceived as contrary to Maine's unique character and quality of place. Previous proposals were never endorsed by the state's major newspapers; and opposition to gambling facilities was well-organized, well-funded and supported by former and current governors.
- Although voters in 2003 approved a so-called "racino-slot" facility in Bangor, they also overwhelmingly rejected a tribal casino facility in the town of Sanford.
- A similar proposal to locate a casino in Oxford was largely rejected by Maine voters in 2008, despite a significant downturn in the economy and the promise of job creation and new tax revenues.
- The operators of the Bangor racino formed a PAC in 2010 to oppose the latest proposal in Oxford. Supporters of a proposed casino projects in the nearby city of Lewiston and in the city of Biddeford were also opposed to Oxford, fearing it would diminish their own projects.
- Polling conducted by three different firms showed anemic support for the Oxford proposal, indicating it would be a neck-to-neck finish.

## TACTICS:

Our team's greatest strength came from our **disciplined adherence to our core message points**, a tactic that was noted by Dennis Bailey, one of Maine's most well-known campaign strategists who also happens to be the leader of *CasinosNo!*, Maine's strongest gambling opposition group.

"... *the Oxford casino [campaign] ran a smart, disciplined \$3 million campaign* . . .," Bailey wrote on [his blog](#) while explaining why a later casino measured failed miserably.

Of course, our team also executed several other smart strategies, including frequent focus group testing, strategic ad buys and good ol' fashioned grassroots campaigning.

Unlike previous proposals, our team was closely connected to both the host community of Oxford and the state of Maine, factors that certainly played in our favor.

Just like any other major campaign, there were times of incredible tension and disagreement, but we never strayed from our message.

## RESULT:

On November 2, 2010, Maine voters narrowly approved our proposal. As predicted, the victory margin was razor thin (50.4 percent to 49.6 percent), but it held up to a recount challenge mounted by the opposition.

For the first time, Maine voters approved a full-scale casino facility that included traditional table games and slot machines. But a year later, proposals for similar facilities in Calais, Biddeford and Lewiston were defeated.



The Oxford Resort Casino held a grand-opening ceremony on June 5, 2012.