

# Is Long Beach About To Gamble On Casinos?

By noon, more than 1,500 Long Beach residents had signed in and voted in the non-binding gaming referendum. Joanna Hudson's ballot was a vote against the casino concept.

„I can't see us having it," she said. „I like Long Beach as the little city where I moved to after I married 50 years ago."

What voters were asked to decide was whether Long Beach should open the north side of Highway 90 near downtown, and across from the harbor, to casino developers.

If the answer is yes, Rob Stinson welcomes the competition.

„Anything to see the growth, so we've got money for our kids and schools," he said.

Despite watching his business crumble to the ground during Katrina, Stinson still has a lease to operate the Long Beach Lookout restaurant in the city's harbor. His hurricane damaged property just happens to be across the street from a potential casino site.

„Hopefully they're for growth in the city," Stinson said, referring to Tuesday's voters. „But if they're not, then we'll have to look for another avenue or go back to the drawing board and recreate it."

Long Beach's mayor says he's heard just about enough casino talk.

„For the city's sake, it's time to get this finished," Billy Skellie said.

Last Thursday and Friday, Skellie attended special meetings

called by two aldermen. Both meetings were set up to try and cancel Tuesday's referendum. Both meetings fell apart when not enough aldermen showed up.

The mayor seemed glad it was finally election day, because in his mind, the city had to move past the political bickering, and beyond the polarizing casino issue, so hurricane recovery could become a top priority again.

„We need to address each issue fresh and open minded and move on. We have much to tend to to recover,“ Skellie said. „We have other business is what I'm saying. We have to move along.“

In the past, Long Beach has never rolled out the red carpet for casino developers. On three previous occasions, a majority of city voters urged aldermen to keep casinos away from Long Beach's shoreline. Vote number four comes on the heels of a hurricane that pummeled several sections of the city.