

## From National Day Rally Speech - 22 August 2004

Let me give a controversial example. It's quite a controversial one, some people told me don't raise it, your first rally speech, very dangerous, but I'm going to do it anyway. It's to do with the casino.

We said 'No' to the casino for a very long time. I've said 'No' to the casino for a very long time. In 1985 we had a recession. I remember the late Mr Teh Cheang Wan wanted the casino, argued for it. We said 'No'. We didn't proceed.

This time round we had an Economic Review Committee, the subcommittee has put up the proposal for a casino. On the ERC I said 'No', a majority of the members said 'No', we didn't recommend it.

But the subject didn't die. And we have to reconsider because the argument comes up, the situation changes.

Why is the situation different? Because there are cruises to nowhere. More and more cruising to nowhere. Some don't even cruise, some anchor nowhere.

You can go to Batam. I'm told there are 13 down there. I haven't been there but Wong Kan Seng has been. He told me it was by accident.

And Singaporeans go there, so Singaporeans are already doing this, right?

Then you want tourists. There are millions of tourists because the Indians have money to spend, the Chinese have money to spend, every tour group to Singapore goes to Genting.

Macau is opening up. Now they have broken the monopoly, new operators, more shows, more games. If we want to grow our tourism traffic and double the number of tourists to Singapore, we don't just want them to come here because of gambling, but if gambling is one of the things they want to do, then maybe we should allow them to do that in Singapore, find some way to do that.

And if, as a result of that, I get over 10 years double the traffic volume, I think we should think about it. So MTI has come with a new proposal, not just casino but an integrated resort, entertainment centre. So you have shows, you have family entertainment, you have food, restaurants, art, all sorts of things and in the middle of course you also have this place.

Should we say no? Well, I think we take a deep breath and think about it carefully.

I know many Singaporeans have expressed concerns and very strong concerns and the religious groups particularly have very strong views. And their objections are not irrelevant, they are valid objections. It's because of these objections that for so long we haven't done this.

But I think we shouldn't just say no. I think we should consider can we have the casino and still contain the social problems? Let's study it, let's see if there's some way to do it.

So I think what we are going to do is to request for proposals.

Let's put out to say we are going to impose the following restrictions: Singaporeans below a certain income, you don't go. I mean, if they want to travel all the way to Batam, that's them but we will not make it easy for people to go broke and ruin their families in Singapore.

But if a millionaire wants to bring another millionaire friend from China or India, I don't think I should say no to him. It may help lessen my other taxes.

So I think we will find a reasonable restriction, draw a line, call for the proposals, test the market. Let's see what proposals come in. If it makes sense and people think that this is worth doing commercially, we make a judgment, we proceed. If it's not worth it, not worth the downside risk, then we will call it off.

We will consider all views before deciding. Finally, if we decide against, then I think we will have had a valuable debate in our society, a valuable discussion and sent a strong signal that we are prepared to discuss all sorts of things and reopen long-settled issues.

But if we decide to proceed, then the final solution which we implement will have to address the valid concerns which Singaporeans have raised.

So it's not a black and white. I mean, it's looking for an appropriate middle way where we can have our cake and also eat most of it.