

Political climate may curb casino plans in Wisconsin, legal experts say

MILWAUKEE (AP) — A lobbying scandal in Washington, D.C., and efforts to curb new off-reservation casinos could harm the chances for casino proposals in Wisconsin, experts in American Indian law say.

Federal approval of any off-reservation casino is unlikely in the next three years, said Eric Eberhard, a Seattle lawyer with an extensive tribal gaming practice. He noted such proposals have languished under President Bush.

Making the situation worse for casinos is a scandal involving lobbyist Jack Abramoff, who has pleaded guilty to federal charges stemming from schemes to bribe public officials and defraud Indian tribes who were his lobbying clients, Eberhard said.

Still, backers of three off-reservation casino proposals in

Wisconsin say they remain committed to working toward getting approval from the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The three off-reservation casino proposals are: the Menominee tribe's \$808 million casino plan for Kenosha; a plan by the Bad River and St. Croix Chippewa bands for a \$200 million casino in Beloit; and the Lac du Flambeau Chippewa tribe's \$110 million casino plan in Shullsburg.

Bruce Greene, a Boulder, Colo.-based Indian law expert, said the Abramoff scandal heightened concern over tribal casinos.

"I don't think the climate is going to support any expanded gaming efforts by tribes," he said.

U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., has argued Congress never intended Indian gambling

to grow into Las Vegas-style operations bringing in almost \$20 billion a year.

McCain, chairman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, is pushing to strengthen the Indian gaming act by making Indian gaming more transparent and increasing the safeguards to protect patrons.

U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., recently introduced a bill to impose a two-year moratorium on new tribal casinos.

Greene said McCain's proposal will likely inhibit federal action on pending casino plans.

A spokesman for the Menominee tribe, Evan Zeppos, said changing the rules for proposals that already are developed would be unfair.

Existing rules already require extensive public review and local support and have not allowed off-reservation casinos to pro-

liferate, he said.

Only three off-reservation casinos nationally have met all required approvals since 1988. One of those casinos was the Forest County Potawatomi's Milwaukee casino.

Tribes nationwide have proposed 10 off-reservation casinos, including the three from Wisconsin, said George Skibine, the Bureau of Indian Affairs official in charge of reviewing the plans.

Tribes seeking federal recognition or restoration of tribal status have proposed a similar number of casino plans.

Skibine said he didn't think the way his agency looked at off-reservation casino plans has changed in the current political atmosphere.

"We just implement the law that's on the books now," Skibine said.

Census: Navajos are 2nd largest Indian group

ALBUQUERQUE (AP) — Members of the sprawling Navajo Nation make up the second largest American Indian group in the nation, according to a new report by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The report, based on 2000 Census data for Indians and Alaska natives, shows that of the people who identified themselves as American Indians and no other race, 276,775 were Navajos. Cherokees numbered 302,569.

Apaches, which include members of the Mescalero Apache and Jicarilla Apache tribes of New Mexico, numbered 57,199 while 59,621 people identified themselves as pueblo Indians, according to the report.

Among those identifying themselves as more than one race, 875,276 said they were part Cherokee and 309,575 said they were part Navajo. Another 104,556 identified themselves as part Apache and 73,687 were mixed-race pueblo Indians.

The report also showed that nearly 43 percent of pueblo members and 43.6 percent of Navajos were more likely than other Indians to speak a language other than English at home while speaking English "very well." That's compared with nearly 18 percent for all Indians and Alaska natives.

Navajos, Apaches and pueblo Indians were less likely than other Indians to have a college degree, the report said.

While 11.5 percent of all Indian groups reported having a bachelor's degree, only 6.9 percent of Navajos did. Nearly 10 percent of pueblo Indians and 8.5 percent of Apaches had degrees.

The Census figures show that about one-fifth of Indian households were headed by a woman alone and 7.5 percent were headed by a single man. Forty-five percent were headed by married couples.

Fake art prompts plan to certify authentic work

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Juanita L. Peters sits on a sidewalk beneath the historic portal in Albuquerque's Old Town, hoping the few winter tourists wandering the plaza will stop and look at her handmade turquoise earrings and necklaces.

For Peters, selling her small works of art means more than keeping alive a tradition handed down by her mother. There are times she guards her spot under the portal for an entire day to earn enough to pay her bills.

"I have no other income," said the Santo Domingo Pueblo woman.

A proposal being considered by the New Mexico Legislature could be a big step toward making things easier for Peters and other American Indian artists who rely on their crafts to make a living.

Rep. Patricia Lundstrom's bill would set aside \$125,000 for the state Licensing and Regulation Department to study and propose rules to establish a certifi-

cation stamp for arts and crafts made by Indians in New Mexico. The aim is to boost sales and ensure that the expanding market isn't tainted by fakes.

One other state, Alaska, sponsors a similar program that protects the work of native artists and guarantees buyers that items bearing a "Silver Hand" seal were handcrafted by an Alaska Eskimo, Aleut or other Indian artist.

The New Mexico legislation stems from complaints about

imitation art being sold in Santa Fe and Gallup, which is known as a hub for collectible jewelry produced by artists from nearby Zuni Pueblo, the Navajo Nation and the Hopi reservation in eastern Arizona.

A deadline is looming, though: The Legislature adjourns this week and the money to study the certification plan is tied up in a budget bill that has been criticized by Gov. Bill Richardson.

Dig at park site reveals artifacts

CRANBERRY, Pa. (AP) — An archaeological survey at a planned township park uncovered American Indian artifacts dating back 3,000 years.

The dig uncovered more than 3,000 items, including arrowheads, spear parts, tools and pottery, on 115 acres of farmland that Cranberry Township bought to turn into a park.

Christine Davis, an archaeological consultant, said the artifacts date between 1,000 B.C. and 95 A.D.

The excavation also turned up remnants of a cranberry bog for which the Butler County township was named.

Cayugas pay taxes to advance trust application

AUBURN, N.Y. (AP) — Seneca and Cayuga counties will lose millions of dollars and be prevented from enforcing laws if the Cayuga Indian Nation of New York is allowed to put its lands into federal trust, officials said Friday.

The counties made their arguments to the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs, submitting reports that showed in the first year they would lose about \$85,000 combined in property tax revenue.

Depending on the rate of tax growth, those yearly losses could climb to as much as \$15 million between the two counties.

Friday was the deadline for the counties and the state to file opposition statements to the Cayuga's trust application.

The New York Cayugas have applied to put

all their land holdings in the two counties into federal trust, which if approved, would make them exempt from taxes, local laws and zoning regulations.

On Thursday, the tribe paid more than \$178,000 in delinquent and current property taxes, a required step in the application process. Until then, the Cayugas had refused to pay taxes, maintaining their land should be tax-free because it lies in their ancestral homeland in both counties.

"The issue is not the taxes past due, but the taxes that will never be paid if the land is taken into trust," said Robert Shipley, chairman of the Seneca County Board of Supervisors.



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