

Tribes challenge ruling over off-reservation casinos

LAS VEGAS (AP)—A major policy change this year by the Department of Interior will slow the growth of the multibillion-dollar Indian casino industry, which has gained controversy for developments in communities far from reservation land.

The change, made in a series of letters and a memo issued in early January, essentially rejected 22 applications for new off-reservation casinos, by hinging their approval on a single criterion: the distance from the reservation.

While the change was hailed by opponents of the sprawling business that raked in \$25.1 billion in gambling revenues in 2006, many tribes attacked the

ruling as unfair and unjust, robbing them of what many consider their only economic opportunity.

"We were shocked by the lack of due process involved," said Mark Van Norman, executive director of the National Indian Gaming Association. "The Department of Interior created a new regulatory standard one day, didn't notify anybody and applied it the next day."

The St. Regis Mohawks in upstate New York, one of two tribes that sued the department, called the decision racist and paternalistic because it purported to look out for the best interests of the tribes by supporting the integrity of reservation life.

"It's outrageous for us as

Mohawk people to be told that we can't sustain our community relations," said St. Regis Chief Lorraine White.

White said male members of the tribe had for decades traveled to faraway construction sites to support their families on the reservation in upstate New York.

"What a bunch of bulls—when you're talking to the very people who actually built New York City with their hands," White said.

When its development partner, Empire Resorts Inc., abandoned it following the change, the St. Regis tribe dropped its suit and called on Congress to overturn the policy or have its application grandfathered in.

Longtime Miami Nation chief dies

MIAMI, Okla. (AP)—Floyd Ernest Leonard, the longtime chief of the Miami Nation, died Saturday, tribal officials said.

Leonard, 82, died in a Joplin, Mo., hospital following an unspecified illness. He spent 27 years as the Miami Nation's chief.

"He was a great man and a great chief," said Tom Gamble, the tribe's second chief.

Leonard was born in Picher

in 1925 and served in the U.S. Coast Guard during World War II. He began serving the Miami Nation in elected positions in 1953, and first became chief in 1974, serving eight years.

He returned as the tribe's chief in 1989 and served until his death.

"I always found Chief Leonard to be interested in Indian affairs," said Wyandotte

Nation Chief Leaford Bearskin. "He supported all programs, locally and nationally. ... He was a wonderful chief."

Leonard is survived by his wife of 61 years, Patricia. Funeral services are set for Tuesday at the Miami Nation cemetery.

Border casinos especially profitable for tribes

TULSA, Okla. (AP)—Casinos operated by the state's American Indian tribes that are located near the state's borders are proving especially profitable.

State Treasurer Scott Meacham estimates that 25 percent of total casino revenues in Oklahoma come from out-of-state pockets, particularly people from Texas, Kansas and Missouri who cross the border to gamble.

"We think that number is a modest estimate," he said.

The Choctaw Nation, Kiowa Tribe, Chickasaw Nation, Comanche Nation, Cherokee Nation, Tonkawa Tribe and several Ottawa County tribes are among those operating casinos located near a border. The only major highway border crossing without a casino is Interstate 40 in western Oklahoma, where the state borders Texas.

The Tonkawa Tribe built its Native Lights Casino along U.S. Highway 77 near the Kansas border. The Choctaws has a casino in Pocola, near the Arkan-

sas state line, and the tribe spent \$18 million to refurbish it. They also operate border casinos in Durant and Grant.

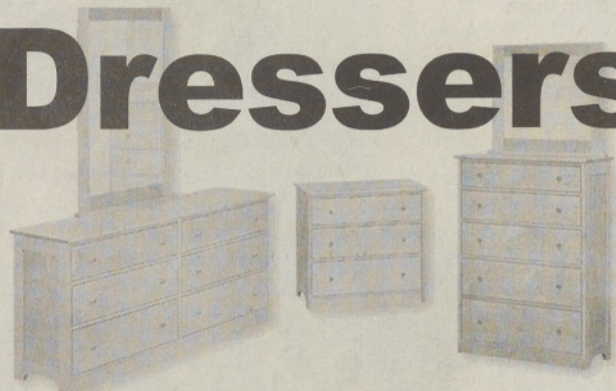
Janie Dillard, the Choctaw Nation's executive director of gambling, said 68 percent of the Pocola casino's customers come from out of state. She said the tribe focuses its marketing efforts in western Arkansas communities including Fort Smith, Fayetteville and Van Buren.

Two tribes located nearer to Texas, the Kiowas and the Comanches, operate casinos in Devol within walking distance of each other. Oscar Codopony, the Comanche Nation Gaming Commission chairman, said gamblers from Texas routinely walk between the two facilities.

"We watch the dollars, and we can see that the Red River site does outperform our Lawton facility," Codopony said.

According to the National Indian Gaming Commission, Oklahoma has about 94 Indian casinos.

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