

Casinos’ disputed games play on

By Jerome R. Stockfisch
The Tampa Tribune

TAMPA — The games go on at Seminole casinos as lawyers, lawmakers and tribal officials deliberate the arcane world of gaming law and Indian sovereignty in the wake of a court ruling that voided an agreement between the state and the tribe.

Last week, the Seminoles and Gov. Charlie Crist filed separately for a rehearing with the state Supreme Court after justices ruled July 3 that Crist overstepped his authority in negotiating the deal, or “compact,” without the Legislature’s approval. The state House of Representatives filed the suit last fall.

A wrinkle in the case is that Seminoles are already offering high-end slot machines, blackjack and baccarat, games that previously were not allowed on reservations but were sanctioned under the now-invalid compact. Until the Supreme Court order is final and the request for a rehearing is resolved, the games will go on.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court is one week into its monthlong summer recess. A new Legislature convenes after the November elections, with new leadership. And the case could move to federal courts, because the U.S. Department of the Interior ultimately oversees tribal-state agreements.

As for now, “there’s not much going on,” acknowledged Barry Richard, an attorney for the Seminoles.

In November, Crist announced he and the tribe had reached agreement on a deal that allowed the Seminoles to offer the same higher-caliber “Class III” slot machines that are allowed in South Florida racetrack and jai-alai casinos. The deal also allowed the tribe to exclusively offer “banked” card games: blackjack, baccarat and similar games in which participants play against the house. In return, Florida would get a cut of the action, totaling billions of dollars over the 25-year compact.

The Supreme Court, however, said that only the Legislature can change state law, and Crist’s deal was invalid.

Several scenarios could unfold in the coming weeks and months:

- The existing deal could be brought before the Legislature for ratification. However, a Republican majority in the House opposed the Crist deal, calling it an expansion of gambling. Fresh faces in the Capitol and its leadership offices come November might be more receptive.

- Crist and the tribe could negotiate a new deal, one that doesn’t include card games. The Seminoles would have little incentive to consider such an agreement, though. When negotiations bogged down last year, the Interior Department released its own procedures on Class III gaming for the tribe to follow in the event no deal could be reached. The federal procedures would allow the high-end slots without the card games - with no state regulation whatsoever and no revenue sharing.

- There may be law enforcement action, particularly if the Supreme Court denies the requests for a rehearing, because the tribe is now offering games allowed by a compact that is now invalid. But issues of sovereignty make that proposition dicey. The attorney general’s office can’t intervene because the state can’t act against a sovereign nation. The U.S. Attorney’s Office might, but spokesman Steve Cole of the Middle District office in Tampa said, “At this point, I’m not sure what our role

El Paso legislators spend \$90,000 on campaigns

By Brandi Grissom
El Paso Times

AUSTIN — Three El Paso lawmakers who do not have challengers for their legislative seats spent more than \$90,000 in campaign cash during the first half of this year.

Campaign finance reports that state Reps. Norma Chávez and Joe Pickett and state Sen. Eliot Shapleigh filed this week indicate the lawmakers’ campaign accounts were briskly bringing in cash and shelling it out in a year when none of them face political opponents.

The lawmakers said campaign accounts are critical to keeping up with their duties in the community and in Austin. Their \$7,200 annual salary for work in the Legislature just doesn’t go far, they said.

But campaign finance reform advocates said the existing contribution system has too few limits and too many possibilities for corruption. In a system in which a large percentage of lawmakers’ campaign money comes from lobbyists trying to influence legislation, advocates said, opportunities for conflict abound.

“It’s almost even worse

than spending taxpayer money,” said Craig McDonald, executive director of Texans for Public Justice, an Austin-based political watchdog group. “It’s money from special interests É and these are the same special interests who want you, a lawmaker, to vote with them.”

From January through June this year, Chávez raised and spent more than any other local lawmaker except state Rep. Pat Haggerty, who lost a massively expensive primary contest.

The \$24,425 she raised exceeded amounts collected by state Rep. Paul

Moreno, who also lost his Democratic primary race in March, and by state Rep. Chente Quintanilla, who faces a Republican challenger in November.

Her largest contribution, \$10,000, came from Texans for Lawsuit Reform, a group that promotes limits on damage awards in lawsuits and typically gives generously to Republicans.

Chávez spent \$45,316, more than any other local legislator except Haggerty and Moreno.

This spring, she said, she

spent heavily on voter registration efforts, on helping local candidates and on supporting U.S. Sen. Barack Obama’s presidential campaign.

“Those things are important to having a democratic community and good government,” she said.

Chávez’s report shows she spent at least \$10,900 on travel in the first half of the year. A February trip to Las Vegas to campaign for Obama cost about \$1,500 for airfare, rental car and a suite at the Rio All-Suite Hotel and Casino.

Airfare for an April trip to help Obama in Philadelphia cost more than \$800.

Chávez also spent thousands on airfare and rental cars in Austin, where she works at the Capitol and attends classes at the University of Texas at Austin.

Chávez said the spending is part of what it takes to remain active in the community and to do her job as a legislator and political figure.

She said she doesn’t feel beholden to major contributors who help finance those activities.

“The person who gives me \$1,000 has the same access as

someone who gives me \$100 or \$10,” she said.

Sen. Shapleigh didn’t fall too far behind Chávez in his campaign account activity in the first half of the year.

He raised \$23,300 and spent about \$31,600.

“Those that know me know where I stand,” Shapleigh said. “And I tell them I appreciate the support for my campaign, but they’ll have the same access as any citizen from El Paso.”

Shapleigh’s largest contribution, \$5,000, came from the Oklahoma Chickasaw tribe.

The biggest category of spending for Shapleigh was his staff, whom he paid about \$5,500.

Gifts and awards for staff, other senators and constituents accounted for another \$3,300 from Shapleigh’s campaign coffers.

“We give hundreds of awards every year to recognize and honor El Pasoans for achievements, honors and good grades,” he said. “I see that as part of what our office should do.”

And El Paso-flavored gifts to other lawmakers, he said, help remind them about great things in the community when

it comes time to vote on issues such as the medical school.

Shapleigh also paid about \$1,600 to 701 N. St. Vrain Joint Venture, a company that he said his wife owns. The company provides Shapleigh’s campaign office space, and the payment, he said, was reimbursement for office expenses such as Internet access and paper.

“That’s what the law permits, so that’s what we do,” Shapleigh said of the office arrangement.

When it comes to bringing in cash and spending it, Shapleigh said he promised his family not to use their own earnings on politics.

He said he raises and spends only what’s necessary and doesn’t keep a multimillion-dollar campaign balance like some senators do.

Pickett’s campaign account was the least active among local legislators. He raised only \$6,300 and spent about \$16,600.

Pickett’s largest check, \$2,500, came from the Texas Association of Realtors.

The majority of his campaign cash was spent on an apartment and transportation in Austin.

Natives due for unclaimed property funds

Sue Kwon
KPIX

SAN FRANCISCO — The federal government is looking for approximately 10,000 Native Americans living in the Bay Area who have money coming to them. It turns out tribal property they left in other states is earning millions of dollars and it is sitting unclaimed.

The Office of the Special Trustee for American Indians is now launching a national campaign to find 80,000 WAUs or Native Americans with whereabouts unknown. They have \$72 million dollars coming to them.

“These accounts have 10 cents to hundreds of thousands of dollars in them,” said Ross Swimmer, Special Trustee for American Indians.

One of the people the Department of the Interior is looking for is Martin Waukazoo. He is a member of the Lakota tribe who migrated from South Dakota to California 30 years ago. Over the years, the government lost his contact information.

“I didn’t know I was lost. Now, I’m anxiously looking forward to finding out what partial land or how much land I do have,” Waukazoo.

CBS 5 ConsumerWatch went to the Department of the Interior website, typed in Martin’s name and was directed to toll free number. Within a few minutes a live person, not a recording, tells Waukazoo he owns a small share of land - .0006 percent to be exact and it is making money for him.



Elderly couple charged in a drug roundup

Indian Country Today

WILSON, Mich. — An elderly couple charged in a drug roundup on the Hannahville Potawatomi Indian Community in northern Michigan said they were entrapped by federal agents because they have never and would never sell drugs.

“We are not the drug lords they claim we are,” said Edna Keezer, 60, of Wilson, a lifelong member of the Hannahville tribe. “We are everyday Indians living on a reservation trying to live in peace and harmony among ourselves.”

FBI agents told each suspect to name three Natives who might sell drugs - if they wanted charges reduced or dropped, she said.

“FBI Special Agent Jay Johnston is being real underhanded - he is entrapping people,” Keezer said. “He wants you to give up three people so

you won’t go to jail.”

Keezer quoted Johnston as saying, “It’s a game of tag and you are it.”

“They (state and federal agents) are putting wires on you to give up your friends and relatives. They are wiring people to entrap their relatives and whole families.

“They are only interested in people on the reservation.”

“I asked, ‘Can it be off the reservation,’ and Special Agent Jay Johnston said, ‘No, it has to be on the reservation,’” she said, adding that it’s unfair to target Natives and ignore information on white drug dealers.

However, the FBI said it was targeting a location, not race.

The Hannahville investigation was spearheaded by the northern Michigan division of the FBI’s Safe Trails task force, a nationwide effort to stop drugs and violent crimes on American Indian

reservations.

Keezer and her husband, Reed, are each charged with one federal count of conspiracy to distribute marijuana. The Keezers are among 20 people including 16 Natives arrested in a nine-month state and federal drug investigation into the sale of prescription painkillers, marijuana and cocaine on the Hannahville reservation located in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

“I work 12 hours a day, six days a week, and we never have extra money,” said Reed, 55, a former union carpenter who has worked as a laborer for the past two years at a new golf course being built on the reservation.

The Keezers support reservation drug probes, but say they were tricked into doing an alleged criminal act that they would not have been inclined to do if not for the well-orchestrated FBI trap.

The Keezers admit they

made a mistake, but said they would not have been arrested if not for being pressured to do a “favor” for a close friend, Peter Compo Sr., 56, of Mount Pleasant, who the FBI had flipped and told to wear a wire and record phone conversations.

Compo, reportedly a member of the Little Traverse Bay Band of Odawa Indians, is charged with one federal count of distribution of marijuana and Vicodin, one federal count of distribution of Vicodin, one federal count of conspiracy to deliver marijuana and Vicodin, and one federal count of conspiracy to deliver marijuana.

Edna described what happened in their case leading up to their arrest:

“They had a friend [Compo] call up and ask us if we wanted to sell some weed for him - we said ‘no.’ [Compo] said, ‘I have a pound of weed’ and ‘can you

hang on to a half of pound’ while he went to Menominee.

“[Compo] lured us off the reservation into the outskirts of Bark River. He handed me that weed and told me to put it underneath my sweatshirt. I went to my car and as soon as I sat down that’s when the FBI came rushing at us with guns extended - telling me to get out of the car and put my hands on the car. Then more cars came squealing in. The FBI was hiding everywhere, even the bathrooms.

“[Compo] gave us a half a pound of weed. We had no money. No money exchanged hands whatsoever. That month I had just bought a car and paid for the insurance and new tags. We did not have any money.”

Edna believes the investigation involves federal wiretaps. FBI officials said “no comment” when asked about wiretaps.