

Conference showcases casino business

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma’s tribal casinos are abandoning their traditional bingo parlor atmosphere and developing into resort destinations where the emphasis is on entertainment, tribal officials and gaming executives said Monday at a tribal gaming conference and trade show.

“Indian gaming facilities will have to evolve. They’re not old metal buildings full of smoke anymore,” said David Qualls, chairman of the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association.

About 3,000 tribal officials and gaming executives attended the OIGA’s 14th annual conference where they visited displays and kiosks featuring the latest in gaming machines, casino management systems and food and furniture vendors.

Oklahoma is home to 91 gaming centers that have formal compacts with the state, according to Derek Campbell of the Office of State Finance.

But the number of casinos in the state has reached a plateau as existing casinos focus on expanding their property with resort hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues that host top-name performers, Qualls said.

“They’re growing by leaps and bounds,” he said.

Indian gaming in Oklahoma began in the early 1980s with high-stakes bingo games. But casino construction and expansion accelerated after voters in 2004 passed State Question 712, which allowed for gambling agreements between the state and Indian tribes.

The agreements allowed casinos to expand the kinds of games they offered and for the state to share in the revenue. Oklahoma’s take from the tribal agreements was \$70.4 million in 2007, triple the previous year, state records show.

Today, tribal casinos have a \$1 billion impact on Oklahoma’s economy each year and employ 25,000 people, Qualls said.

“If it’s good for the tribes, it’s going to be good for the state,” he said.

Tribal gaming compacts have developed new revenue for the state as well as opportunities for tribes to become self-sufficient and provide better housing, health care and educational opportunities for tribal members, Qualls said.

They also are fueling growth in the number of gaming machines the state has. There are currently 45,000 bingo-based and slot-type machines in the state — more than in the state of Pennsylvania, said John J. Connelly of Las Vegas, international vice president for Bally Technologies, one of dozens of casino vendors at the OIGA trade show.

Casino expansion projects are expected to increase the number of gaming machines in the state by 10 percent, Connelly said.

“We are absolutely focused on this market,” Connelly said. Bally currently has 3,500 machines in the state “and growing,” he said.

Connelly said expansion of the types of games Oklahoma casinos can offer has allowed Bally to market the same state-of-the-art gaming machines found in Las Vegas and Atlantic City in the state.

“Now the advantages we hold are significantly greater,” he said.

Qualls said the expansion of gaming opportunities has prompted OIGA to step up its problem gambler’s program and promote awareness of compulsive gamblers by casino workers.

“I don’t want to take your money,” Qualls said. “If you need to win, you don’t need to play.”

Sponsored forum argues keeping Public Law 280

By Michelle DeArmond and Jose Arballo Jr.  
Riverside Press-Enterprise

SAN JACINTO — The federal law that gives states the right to enforce criminal law on Indian reservations is an antiquated rule that should be repealed, Indian law experts said Monday.

The experts addressed dozens of tribal leaders from across California at the Country Club of Soboba Springs as part of a daylong meeting on Public Law 280. The 55-year-old federal law puts reservations in California and a handful of other states under the authority of state and local law enforcement.

“Why do we still have this damn law on the books? Why don’t we repeal it?” said Joe Myers, executive director of the National Indian Justice Center. “It deserves some consideration.”

Myers derided the law as a holdover from the “termination era,” a time when the fed-

eral government worked to terminate tribes, eliminate reservations and assimilate American Indians.

“If termination worked we wouldn’t be sitting here today talking about tribal sovereignty,” he said, speaking from the podium at the country club owned by the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians. “Public Law 280 is part of a package, and the package was the termination policies of Congress.”

The tribe, whose reservation and casino are near San Jacinto, organized the forum in response to a running dispute with the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department over the law, which the Bureau of Indian Affairs has said is poorly written and confusing.

The tribe requires deputies visiting its reservation’s residential areas for non-emergency purposes to show identification at a guard shack and state their reasons for being there. The Sheriff’s Depart-

ment has said the policy is illegal and impedes investigations.

Both sides maintain that Public Law 280 supports their position.

Riverside County Sheriff Stanley Sniff did not attend Monday’s forum, but the department’s new tribal liaison, Alex Tortes, was there. Tortes, a Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indian, did not address the crowd during the public portion of the forum. Organizers closed the afternoon session, a comment period for tribal members, to the media.

The Sheriff’s Department did not respond to a query Monday about its position on retrocession, essentially meaning California or individual reservations could opt out of the law. In the past, Sniff has said he simply is enforcing the law because he has to.

Sheriff’s deputies study Public Law 280 using a training video produced in 1998 that features police officers,

state officials and members of various California tribes to explain the elements of the law and the history of government-tribal relationships and gives several scenarios deputies may face on reservations, Sgt. Dennis Gutierrez said.

Experts on Monday said the answer may be to push for retrocession.

Carole Goldberg, a UCLA law professor and expert on Public Law 280, said retrocession has worked in the past in other states where tribal leaders have convinced their legislators to allow it. Tribal and federal authorities have stepped in and taken over law enforcement, she said.

“The tribe has to be prepared to take those things on,” Goldberg said.

Tribal and federal officers, who often are Indians, generally are more connected and accountable to tribes than local law enforcement and greater trust develops, she said.

Goldberg would like to see Congress address the issue, and she said there’s a pending bill that addresses Public Law 280 and could be amended to make retrocession easier for tribes.

“It should not be left to the states to have control over whether retrocession takes place,” she said. “The law is a throwback, I agree.”

Soboba Chairman Robert Salgado said he plans to talk to lawmakers about the idea and would like to look into it. In the meantime, he said he’s sending some of his tribal security officers to get trained and certified as peace officers next week.

Jim Fletcher with the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Inland office said that tribes will still need to work with local enforcement, even if they take over policing their own reservations.

“We need to work together as neighbors,” he said. “Sometimes we fight with our neighbors.”

N. Idaho tribe says it struggles to run clinic

LAPWAI, Idaho (AP) — Nez Perce tribal officials say waiting lists and diminishing funds have left the Nimiipuu Health clinic in northern Idaho struggling to care for its patients.

Tribal leaders told their concerns to a delegation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. House Appropriations Committee on Friday.

The delegation toured Nez Perce Tribe clinics in Kamiah and Lapwai.

Julia Davis-Wheeler, a chairwoman of the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee, says funding constraints have kept the dental office at the Nimiipuu Health clinic understaffed and the clinic applies for grants to make up for tight budgets.

The clinic operates with about \$8 million from Indian Health Services, a division of the federal department of Health and Human Services.

Law and review



Associated Press

Robert Salgado, right, chairman of Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians, speaks to the media at a meeting with leaders of other California tribes in San Jacinto, Calif., Monday. Leaders from at least a dozen Indian tribes attended the meeting, which was designed to raise awareness of the limits of the law and review legal options.

Cherokee Nations Council redistricting veto falls

By Clifton Adcock  
Tulsa World

TAHLEQUAH, Okla. — The Cherokee Nation’s General Council overrode an executive veto Monday night to enact a redistricting plan.

The plan creates 15 single-representative districts within the Cherokee Nation’s jurisdictional boundaries.

The previous setup was for nine districts, seven of which had two representatives. The remaining two had one each.

The tribe’s constitution mandates that new districts be drawn up periodically according to population

changes.

Principal Chief Chad Smith vetoed the legislation last month after the General Council passed it 15-2.

Smith said the new districts were drawn up with the incumbents’ chances of re-election in mind; that the administration had not been involved in coming up with the plan; that the plan did not provide a “reasonably equal distribution” of tribal members in each district, as mandated by the tribe’s constitution; and that the council had plenty of time to come up with an alternative.

Before the council voted

Monday evening, Smith addressed its members, asking them to uphold his veto.

He pointed to population differences among the proposed districts and asked that the councilors consider other options, such as a redistricting plan that would create three districts with five representatives each or five districts with three representatives each.

“Certainly, the constitution does not require 15 districts but 15 seats apportioned evenly among districts, however many districts there are,” Smith said.

“The numbers just don’t add up.”

Although a few councilors supported upholding the veto and reconsidering the plan, many said the council had spent years working on the plan, that its main focus is keeping common communities together while trying to evenly divide the districts, and that the measure would withstand legal challenges.

Some councilors also took the administration to task for accusing the council of gerrymandering, vetoing a previous redistricting plan more than a year earlier because it was too close to an election, passing up multiple oppor-

tunities to weigh in on the plan, and, after the veto, distributing to the media quotes from councilors that they said were taken out of context.

“I do think it will withstand constitutional scrutiny,” Councilor Chuck Hoskin Jr. said.

“I also think that the chief gets it wrong when he said we gerrymandered.

“Now at the 11th hour, the administration wants to come have discussions. Those discussions would have been good a month ago.”

The vote to override the veto, which needed a two-thirds majority, was 13-4.

Suspect in tribal shooting stopped

North Kitsap Herald

POULSBO, Wash. — 25-year-old Arlington man was detained on the Edmonds Ferry Dock Sunday night on suspicion of shooting at three members of the Port Gamble S’Klallam Tribe earlier that evening.

No one was harmed in the reported shooting, which took place outside a home on Little Boston Road on the tribal reservation.

Investigating officers and deputies found two .38 caliber bullet casings at the scene of the shooting.

The man suspected of the assault with a deadly weapon is not a tribal member, according to a press release by Kitsap County Sheriff’s

Office.

According to witnesses he was driving a newer, black Cadillac with tinted windows and chrome wheels. It was reported he was driving with his wife and her son.

Upon investigating the incident, deputies believed he was heading back to his home in Snohomish County. Edmonds Police were notified and detained the man after locating the black Cadillac on the ferry dock.

A motive for the shooting hasn’t yet been determined. The man is held at the Snohomish County Jail while authorities investigate the incident. Anyone with information about the incident can contact Detective Ray Stroble at (360) 337-5614.

Pine Ridge cops walk off the job

Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY, S.D. — The Rapid City Agency of the Federal Bureau of Investigation sent agents about midday to Pine Ridge to deal with a situation.

“We received a call that there are some issues between the police and council members,” said Bob Perry, FBI supervisor in Rapid City. “We sent agents to assist the BIA with an investigation.”

Witnesses said that more than 30 police officers walked off the job Tuesday morning in protest of changes to officer assignments and the continued employment of Joe Herman as chief of Oglala Sioux Tribe Police at Pine Ridge and OST Police Captain Milton Bianis.

“We object to the lack of experience by the chief of police. He has 27 years of security experience but only

10 months as a police officer,” said Ken Franks of Pine Ridge, a OST officer for 10 years.

Kevin Yellow Bird Steele, judiciary coordinator for the Oglala Sioux Tribe, said the OST officers were meeting with the judiciary committee Tuesday morning but left the meeting in protest.

There was a confrontation with Herman and OST officers near the Boys and Girls Club east of Pine Ridge.

“I heard they attacked the chief of police and other members of the judiciary committee,” Yellow Bird Steele said.

“They said we beat up the chief. We tried to restrain him from choking one of our officers,” Franks said.

The issues between the officers and the chief have continually escalated, Yellow Bird Steele said.

“They have been threaten-

ing to walk off the job for the last three weeks,” he said. “They say there’s not enough money for the department and they had been assigned to different districts they didn’t like.”

Until recently, tribal police officers were centralized in Pine Ridge and Kyle and would respond to calls for law enforcement from throughout the Pine Ridge reservation.

“It would take one to two hours to reach each district. By then, things had been disbursed,” Yellow Bird Steele said. “Now, he has stationed them in districts. It’s what the people wanted.”

Franks said Yellow Bird Steele is misrepresenting the situation.

“We can fix all the other problems, but these two guys are the ones causing the problems,” he said, referring to Herman and Bianis.