

Gulf casino workers' claims denied for BP funds - USA Today

Written by Administrator

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No dice, he was told. The claim was denied by the Gulf Coast Claims Facility, the agency doling out the \$20 billion in BP's compensation fund to victims of the

spill.

McDonald, who works at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino [Biloxi](#), soon noticed that hundreds of other casino workers also were being denied, although the casinos are right on the [Gulf of Mexico](#)

"Everybody who had the word 'casino' in their claims had their claims denied," says McDonald, 58, who started a blog to gather gripes from other uncompensated casino workers. "It's been extremely frustrating."

McDonald is one of hundreds of casino employees along the Gulf Coast — dealers, bartenders, waitresses, bellhops — who say their requests for compensation have been denied even as non-casino bartenders and waitresses have been paid.

There are about 11,000 casino workers along the [Mississippi](#) coast, and one-third of those rely mostly on tips for salaries, says Beverly Martin, executive director of the Mississippi Casino Operators Association. She has received more than 500 e-mails from casino employees claiming they were denied BP compensation, she says.

While the BP oil disaster and cleanup effort played out a few miles offshore, summer tourists who regularly flock to the Mississippi coast for the beach, dining and gambling stayed away, she says. Gaming revenue for most of the casinos held steady over the summer because casino executives offered incentive packages to bring in more players and because BP contract workers filled seats, she says.

Even though gaming revenue stayed the same over the summer compared with last year, that doesn't mean workers were tipped as usual, she says.

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"It doesn't necessarily translate into a customer spending the same amount of money," Martin says. "We're very dependent on those regular customers, especially during our summer months."

McDonald says he kept busy dealing for BP workers and others at the tables. But the lack of experienced gamblers lowered his tip averages noticeably, he says. He lost about 10% of his usual tips over the summer.

"When players win, they tip more," McDonald says. "When they don't win, they tend to tip less. We saw a lot of non-winning and a lot of non-tipping."

Last month, [Kenneth Feinberg](#), the attorney in charge of the claims facility, met with Martin and other casino and state officials and promised to take another look at casino employees' denied claims. He also appointed Washington attorney Bill Mulvey as casino liaison to the facility.

No workers should have been denied just because they worked at a casino, Feinberg says. Previously denied casino employees holding good paperwork showing they lost tips and wages this summer could reapply for interim payments, a final lump-sum payment and also, if approved, could receive the emergency amount they were initially refused, he says. The deadline to apply for emergency payments was last month.

"I'm sensitive to the casino workers' claims," Feinberg says. "We have every intention of honoring documented casino workers."

Some casino workers say they showed ample documentation the first go-round and were still rejected. Roderick Miller, 44, a dealer at the Beau Rivage Resort & Casino-Biloxi, says he applied in mid-October, submitting paycheck stubs and tax records for the past two years to show he lost more than \$7,000 in tips over the summer. His claim was denied.

Miller's usual repeat customers who travel from Georgia and Florida to Biloxi with their families to spend big on the craps, roulette and other tables told him they were staying away this summer because of the spill, he says. "We should get more consideration," Miller says.

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Laurie Lambert, 37, a server in a casino restaurant in nearby Hancock County, says she received and kept two checks from the compensation fund totaling \$21,100 — 10 times what she requested. Claims by other servers at the same restaurant and dealers at the casino were denied, she says. No one at the local facility office has been able to explain the inconsistencies, Lambert says.

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