

Senator asks Jerry Brown to slow down new casino deals

Written by Administrator
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SACRAMENTO --A powerful Senate Democrat has sent a letter to Gov. Jerry Brown asking the governor not to submit any off-reservation casino agreements for ratification until a more coherent state policy on such deals can be adopted.

"I am deeply concerned by the current ad hoc process of approving off-reservation gaming projects which does not sufficiently protect state interests and our residents," Sen. Kevin DeLeon (D-Los Angeles) wrote in a letter sent to Brown earlier this week.

The senator said he is convening a working group to discuss the issues associated with tribes building casinos on newly acquired land, and invited the governor's office to participate in the discussion.

The letter comes just weeks after Brown won legislative approval for a new 2,000 slot machine casino for the North Fork Rancheria of Mono Indians in Madera County on land the tribe had only recently acquired. Federal law stipulates that typically casinos can be built only on lands recognized as belonging to tribes before 1988, the year the federal government officially sanctioned tribal gambling.

The North Fork deal, reached between Brown and tribal leaders, was eventually ratified by the Legislature, but only after a deeply divided Democratic caucus deliberated for weeks over the casino agreement.

"There was a lot of heartburn," DeLeon said about the North Fork casino deal in an interview on Thursday. "Much of that was caused by the fact that we lack a coherent state policy on these types of issues."

DeLeon said he wants Brown to delay submitting a deal he reached with the Enterprise Rancheria of the Estom Yumeka Maidu for legislative approval. That tribe has also received federal approval, and negotiated a deal with Brown, to build a casino with 2,000 slot machines on newly acquired land in Yuba County.

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That deal must be ratified by both houses of the Legislature before it becomes law.

A Brown spokesman confirmed the office had received the letter, and noted the Enterprise deal was reached more than a year ago, and intends to work for the the compact's passage.

DeLeon's letter was cheered by other tribal advocates who said federal officials are making it easier for tribes to acquire land, setting off a new round of casino fights across the country.

"This discussion," said David Quintana, a lobbyist for the California Tribal Business Alliance who represents a handful of tribes that operate casinos, "is long overdue."

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