

Snoqualmie Tribe responds to allegations over casino operations

Written by Administrator
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by JOHN LANGELEER / KING 5 News

[Bio](#)

| [Email](#)

| Follow: @jlangelierKING5
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SNOQUALMIE -- One day after being accused of running Snoqualmie Casino illegally by replacing its gaming commission with the Tribal Council, Tribal Chairwoman Carolyn Lubenau said a new commission has been selected and is being directed, in the interim, by the tribe's police chief.

Lubenau said the selection of three new Snoqualmie Gaming Commissioners was made Thursday, and had no connection to a lawsuit filed last Friday or a report on accusations included in the litigation by KING 5 the day before.

The lawsuit, filed by former SGC Chairman William Papazian, outlines a deteriorating relationship between the commission and the Snoqualmie Casino staff it is required by law to oversee.

According to federal law, tribal gaming agencies/commissions must be independent from the casinos and tribes they watch.

Lubenau said Thursday the problems between the SGC and the casino had nothing to do with Papazian, but the Executive Director and Manager he hired.

"We want professionals," she explained, "You have to be above reproach. You can't have tantrums."

Lubenau said commission staff frequently threatened to pull gaming licenses from casino personnel "for no reason". The tribe, she said, conducted two independent investigations.

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"It was very clear, if we wanted to have our gaming commission functioning in the way we want to go, we need to terminate those two positions," said Lubenau.

Papazian refused to go along, according to Lubenau and court documents, and resigned.

"It was very amicable," recalled Lubenau, "He said in the resignation it was a family matter."

Beyond what led to his departure is what Papazian alleged has happened in the interim, the SGC being filled with the Tribal Council.

Just one day after the situation became public, Lubenau said changes have been made. Thursday, three commissioners were appointed under an interim Executive Director, police chief Gene Fenton.

None of the commissioners have gaming experience, which is not required by law. Fenton is handling background checks for all casino employees, a task usually handled by the SGC.

"We won't be caught by surprise when things are not working right," said Lubenau, "We can fix things before they get to this point where they unravel so quickly like they did."

As for why Papazian would file a lawsuit against his former employer, accusing it of "fraud", "racketeering", and "money laundering", Lubenau thinks the answer is simple. Money.

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