

Sponsor of failed casino petition drive sues polling company | State

Written by Administrator

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OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — The main sponsor of a failed proposal to allow casino gambling in Nebraska is suing the polling company that failed to gather enough signatures to put the issue on the ballot last year for \$1.3 million.

The Omaha World-Herald reports (<http://bit.ly/2jdVflu>) that Ho-Chunk Inc. has sued Omaha-based Northstar Campaign Systems over the failed petition drive.

Ho-Chunk, which runs a casino near Sloan, Iowa, is the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska's economic development corporation.

Northstar officials said the company didn't do anything wrong and will fight the lawsuit.

Last summer, organizers of the casino petition submitted 119,666 signatures for the proposed constitutional amendment, but more than 41,000 signatures were rejected either as duplicates or because petition signers weren't registered voters in the county listed.

Ho-Chunk had made arrangements with Nebraska horse-racing industry leaders to operate casinos at racetracks in Omaha, Lincoln and elsewhere in the state if the measure passed. The campaign was based partly on a poll Northstar did that suggested 57 percent of likely voters in the state would support expanding gambling.

Attorney Conly Schulte said in the lawsuit that Ho-Chunk would have terminated the agreement with Northstar if it weren't for the company's false statements about the number of signatures gathered and the progress of the campaign.

Ho-Chunk says the number of signatures rejected in the petition drive was abnormally high. And Ho-Chunk says Northstar inflated the number of signatures gathered in progress reports.

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But Northstar attorney Scott Lautenbaugh said the company never guaranteed the results of the petition drive, and it has organized several other successful campaigns before.

"We think we'll be vindicated," he said.

Lautenbaugh said there are practical reasons why the petition effort failed, such as the delay in finalizing the proposal's language until Oct. 15, 2015. That meant the campaign missed most of the Nebraska football home games that fall and the State Fair.

The proposal also required people to sign three different forms to support expanding gambling, setting up a regulatory commission and to tax gambling in the state. Lautenbaugh said getting three signatures is harder.

Information from: Omaha World-Herald, <http://www.omaha.com>

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