

Lansing casino project gets pre-Trump federal response

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 25 January 2017 17:41 -



The proposed \$245 million Kewadin Lansing Casino has been part of a legal dispute three Native American tribes have been a part of for over two years. (Photo: Courtesy photo)

LANSING -- A Native American tribe eager to build a \$245 million casino in downtown Lansing says it has earned a victory that could help end its over five-year legal dispute with opposing tribes.

The Sault St. Marie Tribe of the Chippewa Indians cites a Jan. 19 letter from the U.S. Department of Interior that states the tribe's application for the Lansing casino is "mandatory" under the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act. The letter, obtained Wednesday by the Lansing State Journal, also states the Interior Department will keep the application open so the tribe "may present evidence of an enhancement."

Aaron Payment, the Sault St. Marie Tribe's chairperson, and Lansing Mayor Virg Bernero said Wednesday they believe this letter sent to Payment shows the Interior Department accepts the tribe's legal position and is willing to work with them.

"We are very encouraged by the Interior Department's statement on the tribe's trust application," Bernero wrote in a text message to the LSJ. "It is another step forward in what we knew would be a long, complicated process. We remain completely committed to the project and confident that the Lansing Kewadin Casino, and the Lansing Promise Scholarship it will fund, will come to fruition." Bernero said last year he expects the casino to create [1,500 permanent jobs and 700 construction jobs](#)

Two tribes that oppose the Sault St. Marie tribe's casino project in Lansing interpret the letter much differently.

Lansing casino project gets pre-Trump federal response

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 25 January 2017 17:41 -

Chairpersons for the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi and Saginaw Chippewa Indian tribes cite an excerpt from the letter that states there is "insufficient evidence to allow us to proceed." They also said the Sault St. Marie tribe's failure to get its application for the Lansing casino approved under former President Barack Obama's administration also hurts its chances. The Interior Department's letter to Payment is dated a day before President Donald Trump's inauguration.

A joint statement from the Potawatomi's Jamie Stuck and Saginaw Chippewa's Frank Cloutier emailed to the LSJ said the Interior Department's letter adds the Sault St. Marie tribe's legal position has no merit.

"It's been five years since the (Sault) Tribe and Mayor Bernero promised the people of Lansing that a casino was only one to two years away," the statement said. "At the time we said that was a blatant attempt to mislead the public. The fact is, they are no closer to a casino today than five years ago.

"Furthermore, the incoming Secretary of Interior (nominated U.S. Rep. Ryan Zinke, a Montana Republican) has a record that is not nearly as favorable to off-reservation gaming as the previous administration."

John Wernet, the Sault St. Marie tribe's lawyer, argues that if the tribe's pursuit of a Lansing casino was doomed to fail, then its application would have been rejected years ago. Wernet also said his client's pursuit of a Lansing casino has taken so long because the opposing tribes tied the Sault St. Marie tribe up in over two years of litigation.

"If the answer was 'no', don't you think Obama Administration would've said 'no'?" Wernet said. "We're not yet across the finish line."

The Sault St. Marie tribe filed its casino application to the Interior Department over two years ago. Payment said Wednesday he had a conference call with federal officials last week and was told exactly what the tribe needs to make sure the application process proceeds. He described the tribe's goal as "100% achievable" and said the evidence federal officials seek could be submitted to them in "a matter of weeks."

Lansing casino project gets pre-Trump federal response

Written by Administrator

Wednesday, 25 January 2017 17:41 -

