

Written by Administrator
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Morgan said there also is a fundamental disagreement between the tribes and the governor about what would trigger the 15-year renewal. The governor's position is that the compacts must be renegotiated before they can be renewed, while the tribes contend if both sides can't come to an agreement, the compacts renew automatically.

"For the governor and his staff to take that stance and posture from the beginning, I think that was very surprising to a lot of tribal leaders," Morgan said.

Without a compact in place, Oklahoma tribes would be unable to offer many games at casinos, including advanced slot-machine-style electronic games or card games like poker and blackjack. Casinos could still feature bingo-style electronic games, which remain popular in Oklahoma and don't require the tribes to pay any fees to the state.

Stitt is out of the state this week, but spokeswoman Donelle Harder said Stitt and other candidates for governor made clear on the campaign trail they intended to renegotiate the compacts.

"The governor's position has been consistent since the campaign," Harder said, citing comments Stitt made last summer. "At the time, Stitt praised the tribes for their significant contribution to our state, and said he'd pursue a sound and equitable compact that is in the best interest of all stakeholders."

Harder added that a letter from Stitt's office to each of the 35 Oklahoma-based tribes who have compacts with the state was sent on Friday, four days before the editorial published.

In it, Stitt wrote that Oklahoma's tribal exclusivity fees are the lowest in the nation and that compacts in other states are closer to the 20% to 25% range, but that doesn't appear to be the case.

In Arizona , fees range from 1% to 8%, while in New Mexico fees range from 2% to 10%. In

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neighboring Arkansas, voters approved a casino measure in 2018 that calls for fees from 13% to 20%, but that state's deal allows for commercial operators, not just tribal governments, to apply for a casino license.

"Comparing commercial tax rates in other states to exclusivity fees paid by Oklahoma tribes is an apples-to-oranges comparison," Kimberly Teehee, vice president of government relations for Cherokee Nation Businesses, said in a statement. "Commercial casino operators do not pave roads in their states, build homes for people in their communities, provide college scholarships to needy students or keep hospitals open in rural, underserved communities."

Sean Murphy, The Associated Press

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