

Prime Minister Tony Blair backs Prescott on the super-casino licenses issue

Prime minister Tony Blair has backed his deputy by saying that he had not yet seen any evidence that John Prescott interfered in the selection of the first super-casino to be opened in Britain and that Prescott would stand in as “normal” when he goes on holiday next month.

Speaking on the BBC’s The Politics Show Blair also rejected calls for an enquiry over Prescott’s links with US billionaire Phillip Anschutz despite new evidence, from the chief executive of AEG Tim Lieweke, claiming that the issue of casino licenses came up in a “couple of conversations”.

Lieweke claimed in an interview with the Los Angeles Times that the conversations were very ‘minimal and insignificant’ though. The prime minister responded to questioning over the affair by asking: “Has anybody got any actual evidence that John has interfered in this process in an improper way?”, however, he did concede that there were issues over whether Prescott should have declared the visit.

A spokesperson for Prescott’s said: „Mr Lieweke said the casinos were mentioned, but not discussed. He acknowledged that his company did not lobby Mr Prescott because they realised he had no influence over the granting of the licence. This is in line with what we have been saying all along.“

The Conservative shadow culture secretary Hugo Swire called Prescott “deliberately obstructive” and “less than straightforward”.