

# Ho-Chunk Casino is ready to deal

It may be a few months before they return, but Ho-Chunk Nation officials announced Wednesday roulette, craps and poker will return to their Baraboo casino after a brief, legally induced hiatus. The games were pulled at midnight June 30 last year after a State Supreme Court ruling. The ruling was reversed a few weeks ago.

Ho-Chunk Casino Executive Administrative Officer Jon Greendeer said the ruling is a strong victory for both the state and the Ho-Chunk Nation.

„It did provide more security in both employment and our future,“ Greendeer said. „It also substantiated our position that the tenets of this compact were compliant with state, federal and tribal law.“

The games were pulled after the court ruled Gov. Jim Doyle’s negotiations with state tribes violated state and federal constitutions.

Rep. J.A. „Doc“ Hines, R-Oxford, said if state tribes are allowed to operate casinos they should be allowed to have the same kinds of games as other casinos.

„It gives people who like to gamble some other options,“ Hines said. „There are people who like to play these other table games and if they are not available here, they’ll go someplace else. Each tribe negotiated for itself and they are very competitive with one another – they know if they can do something that attracts the gambling community, they have a leg up.“

Hines said while he wished Doyle would have allowed state legislators some oversight when negotiating the gaming

compacts, he said last month's ruling was a step in the right direction.

„As long as we're going to allow a specific group of people in our society to be the only ones allowed to run a gambling establishment, we ought to have an open, upfront decision as far as how much money those people give to the state," Hines said. „These facilities are almost always full."

Hines said most importantly, the ruling will help the Ho-Chunk Nation continue to improve living conditions for tribal members.

„I have seen right in our district the benefit to Native Americans the casino has brought," he said. „The standard of living is a difference of night and day prior to what it was before the casino."

Greendeer said about 70 percent of casino employees are non-tribal members, so the expected additional business from the new games will help them as well.

According to the Ho-Chunk Nation, the casino offers 2,400 slot machines, 36 blackjack tables, 11 high-stakes tables a 500-seat bingo hall, 315 guest rooms and five restaurants. The casino employs about 1,300 people.

Greendeer said the games were not the casino's biggest money-makers, but provided patrons more variety.

„After those games were pulled we put ourselves at a competitive disadvantage... losing those options for our guests," he said. „We're trying to provide the best total package," he said.

Greendeer said he hopes the games will be back before the end of the year. He said casino officials will re-evaluate how popular the games were when they were at the casino, and what people are looking for in gaming options.

„We'll try to encapsulate that in our plans to make sure we're utilizing space best as possible," Greendeer said. „We're enthusiastic about getting those out as soon as possible. We have to make sure we don't over-emphasize one aspect of the gaming floor over another.“

Ho-Chunk Casino Executive Manager Kristin White Eagle said staff members are eagerly anticipating the return of the games.