

3 Indian casinos possible in Ohio?

Instead of a single casino that generates USD 240 million for Ohio counties, the gambling measure on the November ballot could lead to three casinos that pay no state and local taxes, opponents of the measure said yesterday.

The gambling measure, designated as Issue 6, would provide a boost to an Oklahoma-based Indian tribe that's been struggling for years to win federal approval to open one or more casinos in Ohio, the Vote No Casinos committee said.

If the Eastern Shawnee tribe succeeds, the wording of Issue 6 would allow the operators of the Clinton County casino to lower their tax rate from the 30 percent in the ballot measure to as little as zero. The measure states that if a second casino opened in Ohio, the original casino would pay „the lesser of the rate taxed on another casino or 25 percent.“

Federal law prohibits state and local governments from taxing casinos on tribal land. However, states may negotiate compacts that require tribes to make payments.

The Ohio gambling opponents said yesterday that the Eastern Shawnee tribe has submitted applications with the U.S. Department of the Interior to acquire land for casinos near Monroe, in southwestern Ohio, and Botkins, in the northwestern part of the state.

„The conclusion is clear: If Indian casinos locate in Ohio and are taxed at the federal rate of zero, I think under terms of the amendment, the tax rate on the casino would drop to zero and the counties would get nothing,“ said D. Michael Grodhaus, attorney for the Vote No Casinos group.

The pro-casino campaign, dubbed MyOhioNow.com, pitches the

proposed USD 600 million gambling emporium as a way to stimulate the economy of central and southwestern Ohio, provide new entertainment options and pour USD 240 million a year in tax revenue into the budgets of all 88 counties.

The group's leaders admitted yesterday that they erred by including wording that could lower the tax rate to zero and said they were working on wording to fix that.

Lyle Berman, chief executive of the Minnesota-based company that would operate the casino, said MyOhioNow.com could not envision an Indian casino in Ohio.

„We know there's no Indian casino that's ever going to be opened in Ohio," he said. „We know it would never happen.“

The Eastern Shawnee tribe's Seattle-based attorney, Mason D. Morisset, and Columbus-based lobbyist, Terry L. Casey, did not return calls yesterday. A spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of the Interior also did not return a call.

Berman's Lakes Entertainment Inc. has five casinos, four of which are operated in partnership with Indian tribes.

The Eastern Shawnee operate a single casino in Missouri near the Oklahoma border.

Berman said the MyOhioNow.com group has not coordinated its efforts with the Eastern Shawnee, nor would it help the tribe build a casino if it wins federal approval. An Indian casino near Monroe would be just 25 miles from the proposed MyOhioNow.com casino.

„Lakes Entertainment would never be in support of an Indian casino in Ohio," Berman said.