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## Senate approves casino compact with Gun Lake tribe

By DAVID EGGERT

Associated Press Writer

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- A deal that will give the state a slice of revenue from a planned Native American casino southwest of Grand Rapids was approved by the Michigan Senate on Wednesday, over objections from Republicans opposed to gambling.

The vote came less than two weeks after the federal government put 147 acres of land into trust for the casino in Allegan County's Wayland Township.

A 2007 compact negotiated by Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomi Indians passed on a voice vote in the Senate. The tribe also is known as the Gun Lake tribe.

Though an official vote tally was not recorded, at least nine Republicans in the 37-member, GOP-led chamber stood up after the vote to oppose the casino.

Michigan will have 24 casinos once the Gun Lake casino and another in Battle Creek are built. Only Nevada has more casinos, according to critics.

"When are we going to reach the saturation point in Michigan? What are we becoming as a state?" asked Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom, R-Norton Shores, who opposed the compact.

Another Republican from the area, Sen. Patricia Birkholz of Saugatuck, said opening casinos is a "negative business model" that boosts crime and ultimately hurts, not helps, local communities.

Supporters have stressed the economic benefits of the new casino and have said passing the compact ensures the state cashes in to the tune of \$15 million during the first year of operation. If the compact had not been approved, the tribe could have moved ahead with a casino anyway, according to backers.

The Democratic-led House OKed the compact in 2007.

"Opponents of the Gun Lake Tribe have been wrong for over ten years," tribal spokesman James Nye said Wednesday.

Matt Marsden, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, said "this was not a gaming issue but a regulatory issue. The state has an obligation to secure whatever revenue we can from the gaming industry in Michigan."

A groundbreaking date has not been set. The casino is expected to open 12 to 16 months after construction begins.

The state will receive 8 percent of the casino's take from slot machines for the first \$150 million. The state will get 10 percent or more from slot revenue above that amount.

The compact requires gamblers to be 21 or older. Compacts with other tribes that operate Michigan casinos have set the age limit at 18.

States often seek compacts with tribes to gain some regulatory authority and generate revenue for the state treasury. Without a compact, states risk missing out on revenue from casinos that the federal government would allow to open anyway.

In return, compacts offer tribes a measure of territorial protection from gambling competition and may expedite the process of opening new casinos. Compacts also can foster cooperation between tribes and surrounding local governments.

The Gun Lake casino is expected to employ about 1,800 people and have about 2,500 electronic gambling machines and 80 gaming tables.

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