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Authorities Raid Wyandotte County Casino

Tribe Says Local Officials Didn't Have Authority For Raid

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KANSAS CITY, Kan. -- Armed with a search warrant, local authorities raided a casino in downtown Kansas City around 6 a.m. Friday morning.

A few employees were inside at the time. Authorities said they charged one employee with a pair of gambling-related offenses, including felony commercial gambling.



The raid came after the National Indian Gaming Commission issued a letter last week, saying the casino could no longer legally operate. The NIGC said the land on which the casino stands does not meet the definition of tribal land for the purposes of gaming under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

The casino is owned by the Wyandotte Tribe, which said it was outraged by the action. But Jason Hodges, a spokesman for the tribe, said the tribe was in the midst of contesting the NIGC's opinion. Authorities should not have closed the casino until that process had run its course, he said.

"We were doing what we were told to do," he said. "We were following procedures. To have county and local officials and everyone else jump in is completely ludicrous."

But Attorney General Phill Kline's office disagreed. They cited Section 18 of the U.S. Code, saying the state of Kansas does have the authority to supervise gambling on Indian land.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius said she was pleased by the casino's closure.

"One of our core values as Kansans is respect for the law. The gaming operation

run by the Wyandotte Nation of Oklahoma is, and always has been, illegal," Sebelius said in a written statement. "I am pleased that state and local officials have worked together to uphold the law."

A federal judge on Tuesday rejected the tribe's request for a temporary restraining order that would have kept the casino open. The judge did so because the commission opinion was not "a final agency action," said David McCullough, the tribe's attorney.

"It's Indian land," he said, stressing that state and local officials had no jurisdiction. "The only issue is whether its available for gaming, and that's a federal, not a state, issue."

In its finding, the commission said while the site is on tribal land, it does not qualify for a casino because the tribe resides in Oklahoma and does not have a strong historical connection to the site, among other things. But the commission also said it would listen to any information the tribe might give the agency that "causes us to reconsider our opinion."

"I think it's probably just starting," McCullough said.

Authorities interviewed about 10 patrons who were in the casino when it was shut down, and they were then allowed to leave, Taylor said. Authorities were video taping the facility Friday morning and two casino employees were helping authorities remove money from the gaming machines. The money will be treated as confiscated evidence. The machines were being disconnected late Friday morning and carried out of the building.

The tribe said the machines are classified as bingo machines, though they look and play like slot machines. The distinction is important because facilities that have slot machines are required to negotiate gaming compacts with the state, while facilities with bingo machines do not, Hodges said.

"You are playing against players at other places across the country, not against the house," he said.

Authorities began removing about 150 of the gaming machines from the casino Friday morning.