

Indian tribes leaning toward favoring Internet gaming

By Rob Hotakainen, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON – Fearing they may get left behind in the rush to expand legalized gambling to the Internet, more U.S. Indian tribes are lining up to back online poker and are angling for new ways to cash in.

Consider the Tulalip Tribes in Washington state: Eight months ago, tribal Secretary Glen Gobin told Congress the tribe opposed any kind of Internet gambling, regarding it as a threat to its two casinos. But on July 26, he told a Senate panel that tribes “must have equal footing to participate” and that Congress should consult with them before junking a 2006 ban on online gambling.

“Glen is a realist,” said W. Ron Allen, the chairman of the Washington Indian Gaming Association, which represents 27 federally recognized tribes.

John Pappas, the executive director of the Poker Players Alliance, a lobbying group that represents 1.2 million members across the country, said it was “definitely safe to say that the tribes’ position is evolving on a federal solution.”

Many tribes still oppose Internet gambling because they worry that gamblers would be less likely to go to casinos. But Allen predicted that there’ll be “less reluctant resistance” as tribes realize that there’s little hope of stopping the push for legalization in Congress.

“Inevitably, they’re going to pass something,” he said. “I think tribes as a general observation would prefer that it not happen, but tribal leaders are being realistic.”

With online gambling expected to quickly become a new cash bonanza, a feud has developed on Capitol Hill over who should regulate it. Two competing plans have emerged so far.

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