

Obama lenient with Indian gaming

By Julie Bykowicz, Bloomberg

As President Obama began his first term in January 2009, an Arizona Indian tribe saw a long-awaited opportunity to jumpstart a plan to build a 225,000-square-foot casino not far from the Cardinals' football stadium.

Five years earlier, through a special company, the Tohono O'odham Nation purchased land outside Phoenix, 160 miles north of the tribe's Sells city headquarters on its Tucson-area reservation. Now, having waited out a freeze on casino construction on property distant from a tribe's reservation by President George W. Bush's administration, it submitted the project to Obama's U.S. Department of the Interior – eight days after Inauguration Day.

Tohono found this White House friendlier. The tribe won initial federal approval and then overcame lawsuits filed by state and local officials and competing tribes. There's one last obstacle: Congressional legislation that would scuttle the project.

The U.S. House last week approved the legislation, and it now moves to the Senate.

"The Bush administration would not have gone in this direction," said Representative Trent Franks, an Arizona Republican who sponsored the bill. "Obama is trying to gain favor with tribal entities. They seem to believe that all of the negatives associated with gambling are subordinate to the political advantage that they believe it brings them by approving these projects."

Read the whole story