

Current Events: Indian Gaming in Wisconsin

Wisconsin DPI Standards Alignment:

Social Studies B.4.10 – Explain the history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and current status of the American Indian tribes and bands in Wisconsin.

Social Studies C.4.6 – Locate, organize, and use relevant information to understand an issue in the classroom or school, while taking into account the viewpoints and interests of different groups and individuals.

Social Studies E.4.8 -- Describe and distinguish among the values and beliefs of different groups and institutions.

English Language Arts A.8.1 – Select, summarize, paraphrase, analyze, and evaluate, orally and in writing, passages of texts chosen for specific purposes.

Goal: Students will come to see the controversy over gambling as an example of modern-day interactions and cultural differences between Caucasians and Natives.

Objectives:

- 1) Students will read the Chippewa Herald article silently.
- 2) Students will formulate an opinion on Indian gaming in Wisconsin.
- 3) Students will give voice to that opinion in a class discussion.
- 4) Students will consider various viewpoints on Indian gaming in Wisconsin as a result of reading the article and hearing the opinions of others.

Like the more distant past, the recent history of Wisconsin Indian nations is also fascinating. It too provides us with a look at how two cultural groups (Caucasian European or Yankee Americans and Wisconsin Indians) interact with one another. American Indian groups in the 20th century still struggle with some government policies and practices.

The Menominee, for example, struggled with the federal government's policy of "termination" in the 1950s. The Menominee Termination Act of 1954 was an attempt at dismantling the reservation system and integrating American Indians into "mainstream" society. In reality, it meant that the government no longer recognized the Menominee as a tribe and stopped giving the tribe financial assistance. Termination was a disaster for the Menominee. Some of the Menominee land was sold, the tribal hospital had to shut down for lack of funds, and many Menominee lost their jobs. Legislators finally restored tribal status in 1973 after much protest.

Another example of modern-day interactions between the tribes and the government is gaming. In 1988, the federal government passed the National Indian Gaming Act. This law says that in states which allow licensed gambling, tribes may own, operate, and regulate casinos. A portion of their revenues goes to the state. Much of the rest of the

revenue funds services on Wisconsin Indian reservations, such as hospitals, libraries, and schools. In addition, the casinos provide jobs for many enrolled tribal members.

However, some people are opposed to Indian gaming because they do not believe that the state of Wisconsin should allow gambling. They believe that gambling can lead people to go bankrupt, possibly turning to crime to get the money they owe or to get money to gamble more. Gambling can become an addiction as people return again and again to try to "beat the odds."

What is your opinion?

The debate recently heated up again in Wisconsin when Governor Doyle signed agreements with 11 Wisconsin tribes extending their contracts with the state to operate casinos. The State Supreme Court has ruled that Governor Doyle did not have the authority to renew the agreements, and that only the State Legislature has that power. Read the article below and discuss it as a class. Do you think that Wisconsin tribes should have the right to operate and regulate casinos? Or is gambling a business that the state should forbid?

From the Chippewa Herald, July 7, 2004

Study: Wisconsin fifth in the nation for Indian gaming revenue

By JULIET WILLIAMS -- Associated Press Writer

MILWAUKEE -- Wisconsin ranks fifth in the nation in the amount of revenue its American Indian tribes earn from their casinos, according to a new national study.

Wisconsin's 11 American Indian tribes collected nearly \$1.1 billion in revenue in 2003, according to the "Indian Gaming Industry Report" prepared for release Wednesday.

Indian gambling grew more than eight times faster than non-Indian casino gambling in 2003, bringing in about \$16.2 billion nationwide, according to the report compiled by Alan Meister, an economist with the Analysis Group in Los Angeles.

"In a day and time previously when our tribal leaders had trouble to even get a loan to buy some furniture, now investors are lining up to be a part of this market," said Ernie Stevens Jr., chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association.

The study found revenue increased 7.5 percent at Wisconsin Indian casinos from 2002 to 2003 as well as at their non-gambling facilities, which brought in another \$62 million in revenue.

California, Connecticut, Minnesota, Arizona and Wisconsin were the highest grossing states in Indian gaming revenue in 2003, together accounting for 61 percent of Indian gaming revenue, the report said.

California's tribes earned \$4.2 billion at their 56 gambling sites.

Meister attributed the increasing popularity of Indian gambling to more casinos, added attractions such as hotels, shopping and entertainment, more games and the social acceptability of casino gambling.

In Wisconsin, the 11 tribes that have compacts with the state were allowed to expand the number of games they offer to include Las Vegas-style games such as craps and roulette. The future of those deals is in limbo after the state Supreme Court ruled Gov. Jim Doyle exceeded his authority in signing them.

Tom Grey, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, said people nationwide are turning against having casinos in their hometowns, despite more attempts by state officials to boost coffers with gambling revenue.

"States become addicted ... once you use gambling as a means to do something, it's very difficult to turn back," he said. "We have to ask who winds up paying for the bankruptcy, the crime and the addiction."

Meister's study did not consider the social impacts of gambling.

It found Indian gambling directly and indirectly provides 460,000 jobs, \$16.3 billion in wages and \$5.3 billion in taxes nationwide.

Stevens, of the gaming association, said surveys show many people support Indian gaming because they know the revenue goes toward tribal economic development.

"They have helped our people to have the kinds of things that many Americans have taken for granted: good roads, good schools, good health care, in some cases even running water and things like that," he said.

States cannot tax tribes because tribes are sovereign governments. But tribes that want to sign deals with states to establish casinos are increasingly offering to share their revenue in exchange for more games and longer deals.

"Most of these states already operate lotteries, so they're already involved in gaming," Meister said. "This is a way for them to benefit from this significant growth of Indian gaming."

Doyle granted Wisconsin tribes unending deals and the right to offer more games in exchange for more than \$1 billion over the next decade. He also is counting on \$206 million in casino payments by June 2005 to balance the state budget.

But the Ho-Chunk Nation last month declined to make its \$30 million payment to the state, citing the uncertainty in the wake of the Supreme Court ruling. And a planned

casino expansion at the Red Cliff reserve near Bayfield is on hold after investors backed out.

The report also found:

--The number of machines at the 22 facilities increased to 16,349 machines in 2003, compared with 15,215 in 2002.

--The number of tables at Wisconsin's Indian casinos grew 10.7 percent to 290, up from 262 in 2002. (Nationwide, the number was up 15.5 percent.)