

# Congressman halts help for 99-year leases

## Chemehuevi tribe loses official assistance

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The Chemehuevi Tribe will not be getting any help from Washington D.C. when it comes to long-term leasing for development.

Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Calif., has tried in the past to get Congress to amend the law to allow the Chemehuevi Tribe to issue long-term leases for tribal and non-tribal members, to promote development on the reservation. But members of Lewis' office said there would be no

new effort to change the law.

"The tribe has asked Lewis to get their 99-year lease," said Lewis' staff member Jim Speck. "He informed them he will not move forward unless communities around the tribal land agree to this. So it has not moved forward at all as far as moving this through Congress."

Chemehuevi Chairman Charles Wood said the tribe was petitioning Lewis to work on the change in law in order to allow residential, commercial and gaming expansion on the reservation. "At present we can only give a 25-year lease for any casino operator."

Under the current gaming compact, the Chemehuevi Tribe may operate one casino with 2,000 gaming machines or two casinos with 1,000 gaming

machines each on the current reservation.

The tribe also is looking at developing an off-reservation casino in the city of Barstow. The tribe has land and a municipal services agreement with the city, but does not have a gaming compact with the state to establish an off-reservation casino. Competing with the Chemehuevis for a Barstow casino is a joint venture between the Los Coyote Band of Mission Indians and the Big Lagoon Tribe. Gaming compacts for side-by-side casinos operated by the two tribes were negotiated by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger last year but an Assembly committee rejected the plan on June 26.

Representatives from the San Manuel band of Mission Indians

went before the Assembly Governmental Organizational Committee, joining the Chemehuevis in opposing the Big Lagoon-Los Coyotes proposal. Both tribes maintain that any Barstow casino should be operated by tribes with a historical connection to the area. Reservations for the Chemehuevis and San Mannels are in San Bernardino County and both tribes say members once lived in the Barstow area.

Before an off-reservation casino may be developed, a tribe must obtain a gaming compact from the governor and get the compact approved by the Legislature. Then the Department of the Interior may place the land in trust as tribal land.