Written by Administrator Thursday, 17 February 2011 16:33 -

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — State gambling regulators on Thursday unanimously chose the biggest-ticket applicant to receive Louisiana's 15th and last available riverboat casino license: the \$400 million Mojito Pointe casino proposed for Lake Charles.

The winning project, selected by the

Louisiana Gaming Control Board, is led by Creative Casinos LLC, owned by former Pinnacle Entertainment Inc. chairman Daniel Lee.

"We're going to build a beautiful resort for that property. It'll be a great asset for the state," Lee said in an interview after the vote. "Now, the real work begins."

Mojito Pointe was chosen over a \$145 million Hollywood Casino proposed for the New Orleans suburb of Harvey by Penn National Gaming Inc., which operates the Hollywood Casino in Baton Rouge, and a \$167 million Hard Rock Hotel & Casino proposed for Lake Charles by Louisiana businessman William Trotter II.

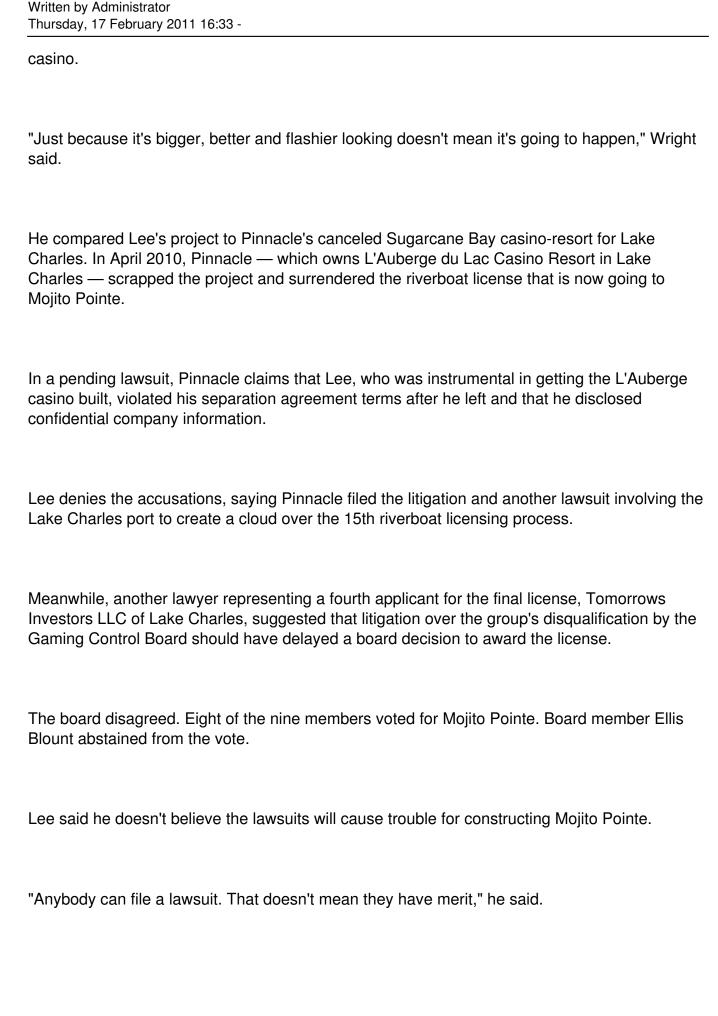
Gambling board member Robert Jones said all three proposals were strong, but he said Lee's offered the largest possible return for the state and Lake Charles region, in jobs and tax revenue.

"I see Mojito Pointe as the clear winner. It would employ 2,000 people, which is more than the other two put together," Jones said after lamenting it was "unfortunate two of you have to walk away empty-handed."

Calcasieu Parish voters in an April 30 election will have to approve the addition of another Lake Charles casino before construction could start. If approved, Lee said Mojito Pointe will be open by the end of 2013.

Lake Charles lawyer Michael Wright urged Gaming Control Board members to vote against Mojito Pointe. He questioned whether Lee could pull together the hefty financing needed for the project and whether Lee's ongoing legal battles with his old company Pinnacle could derail the

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State law limits the number of riverboat casinos to 15.

Thirteen riverboat casinos currently operate in Louisiana: five in Shreveport-Bossier City, three in Lake Charles, two in the New Orleans area, two in Baton Rouge and one near Morgan City. Pinnacle is developing a 14th casino in Baton Rouge.

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