

Congresswoman opposes Indian casino near Spokane

Written by Administrator
Wednesday, 08 May 2013 22:00 -

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — A congresswoman has joined opponents of a proposed Indian casino near Fairchild [Air Force](#) Base outside Spokane, saying such a large, commercial development might prompt the military to close the base in the future.

U.S. Rep. [Cathy McMorris Rodgers](#), a Republican who represents the Spokane area, said in a letter to the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) that the casino posed a risk to retaining Spokane County's largest employer.

"The proposed site, due to its location relative to Fairchild Air Force Base's long-standing flight patterns, presents a clear threat to current and future missions of Fairchild," McMorris Rodgers wrote in the recent letter.

The Spokane Tribe has proposed the major casino and hotel complex just a few blocks from the base and is awaiting approval from the federal government and from Gov. [Jay Inslee](#) to proceed. The tribe contends the development won't impair operations at Fairchild now or in the future.

Leaders of the tribe were not immediately reachable for comment on Wednesday.

Tribal chairman [Rudy Peone](#) issued a statement last week saying the base and the casino project, known as Spokane Tribe Economic Project, or STEP, can co-exist. The tribe, with a 50 percent unemployment rate, contends the casino would provide 5,000 jobs.

"It is unfortunate that some continue to attack STEP with arguments that cannot be squared with the fact-based conclusions," Peone said. "The Air Force has never expressed concern about STEP regarding so-called encroachment to the base."

The Air Force has remained officially neutral as the tribe seeks approval for the casino.

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Fairchild supports 5,700 civilian and military jobs and has an annual economic impact of \$1.3 billion to the region, opponents of the casino said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"You are going to have airplanes overhead above a large resort facility," said [Jim McDevitt](#) , a former U.S. attorney for Eastern Washington who opposes the casino.

Cheney Mayor [Tom Trulove](#) said the potential loss of Fairchild is not worth the risk that would come with building another casino in the area.

"Why take that chance?" Trulove said.

Spokane County Commissioner [Shelly O'Quinn](#) said the Bureau of Indian Affairs was being asked to deny the application.

The casino would be located off the tribe's reservation, which requires rarely given approval from the bureau. The agency is expected to make its decision soon. If approved, the tribe would still need to reach an agreement with Inslee before it can build.

McMorris Rodgers voiced her opposition to the casino in a letter to [Stanley Speaks](#) , Northwest regional director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"I want to ensure that Fairchild continues to have opportunities to expand its missions and capabilities," she wrote.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs issued its final environmental impact statement on the proposal two months ago. It listed the development of the casino, resort and retail space as the preferred alternative.

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The tribe recently had a Washington, D.C., consulting firm conduct a study on whether the development would pose a risk of base closure and whether it could pose a safety threat to planes training in the area. That study said the casino would not pose such a danger.

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