

## Poker players say they've been dealt a raw deal by casino

Written by Administrator  
Friday, 03 August 2018 14:35 -

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**SNOWQUALMIE, Wash.** - Poker players who frequent Snoqualmie Casino say they're getting ripped off.

They say they've contributed thousands of dollars to what's called a player-supported jackpot. Now that the poker room is closing, they aren't sure if they'll get that money back.

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The reason they think they should is a promise they say the casino made to them in writing.

A player-supported jackpot is a special pool of money funded by, in this case, poker players who frequent a particular poker room at Snoqualmie Casino. Each hand, the casino takes a "rake" and those funds go to the jackpot. The jackpot can reach tens of thousands of dollars and players get a cut of that jackpot if they hit a high hand. It's a nice bonus.

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In late July, the jackpot at Snoqualmie Casino's poker room had reached just over \$58,000.

Long-time poker player Lucas Newman says under the total, which is posted on a wall of the poker room and updated every day, is what he believes is a written promise that the casino made to its poker players.

"The promise and the claim that Snoqualmie makes is that 100 percent of the funds collected from the player-supported jackpot will be allocated to poker jackpots. So not blackjack jackpots, not slot machine jackpots, not other games, but specifically poker jackpots," Newman said.

Newman says not following that written promise is unethical. The reason he knows his interpretation of the sign isn't being followed is because of another sign placed just outside of the room informing players the poker room is closing and what the casino plans to do with the jackpot money.

"Outside of the room there is a description of 'hey, we're closing, here's what we're going to do, here's what's going to happen with the jackpots, and here's where the rest of the money is going to go,' which is where this whole thing came about because people read that and said, 'hey, that seems kind of unethical,'" Newman said.

The sign outside the poker room was placed there a month in advance of the poker room closing. It's there that the casino told the players what will happen with their money: it stopped collecting money for the jackpot on July 25. Between July 25 and Aug. 2, the jackpot payouts increased by "approximately double." Any funds left after the closing of the room were distributed to another game at the casino.

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The poker players say this means potentially thousands of dollars of their money will now be used by the casino to promote another game.

“I want them to understand the way that we see it — and not in a belligerent way — but help them understand that hey this promise that you made in writing on the wall for this jackpot is very specific and you are doing something that is counter to that promise. On a business level, they're going to alienate hundreds of people – many of whom will never come back specifically because of this. But also on an ethical level do they really want that headache? It doesn't seem worth it. It's like, 'hey you've made this promise and now you are not going to fulfill it,' Newman said.

According to the [Washington State Gambling Commission](#), Snoqualmie Casino can do this. It's not how the state would advise non-tribal card rooms to handle the closing of a jackpot, but commission spokesperson Heather Songer says Snoqualmie isn't breaking any rules and she explains the difference between commercial (or state-regulated card rooms) and tribal casinos.

“When you have a commercial card room that decides to discontinue a player-supported jackpot they are required by rule to distribute the balance of that jackpot to the players within 60 days. The National Indian Gaming Commission also has some recommendations for how to handle these closed jackpots. Their recommendations are very similar to ours, but, again, they're just suggestions, they are not requirements,” Songer explained. “We do have a good working relationship with the tribes and we'll definitely be in contact with Snoqualmie to let them know that we've received some inquiries from some folks and just to see if there's any guidance that we can help provide or help them work through.”

She says the commission received “a few” complaints about this situation at Snoqualmie Casino and that they have been in contact with the casino.

I have spoken with a handful of poker players upset over the handling of this jackpot and continue to receive phone calls as word spreads that KIRO Radio is looking into this issue.

What does Snoqualmie Casino say about all of this? They wouldn't agree to a recorded

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interview for this story, but did give me a written statement:

*As part "of its vision to showcase new amenities to a broader audience, Snoqualmie Casino has begun several remodeling projects, to include a fully-enclosed, non-smoking section, a private, high-limit gaming salon, and a newly remodeled and upscale café & deli combination, which also leads to the closure of the poker room on August 2, 2018. In making the decision to close the poker room, the casino management team maintained two priorities: providing ongoing employment opportunities to affected Team Members, and providing courteous and transparent notice to its poker players.*

*With regard to the poker room closure and the Player Supported Jackpot Rake (PSJ) in the poker room, the casino continues to follow all applicable regulations as required by the Snoqualmie Gaming Commission, and the Washington State Gambling Commission. As an added courtesy, Snoqualmie Casino provided its poker players with 30 days' advance notice of the room's closure, which also serves as the first day of construction, and the casino has nearly doubled the value of High Hand weekly payouts since announcing the room's closure. To date, over half of the original PSJ has been awarded in the poker room, and by implementing an accelerated payout plan, it is estimated that over two-thirds of the original PSJ will be awarded by the August 2 closure. After the final poker hand is dealt, any remaining funds will be awarded back to the player population via another on-casino floor poker progressive, Ultimate Texas Hold'Em, as required by gaming regulations.*

*The casino management team would like to thank KIRO News for the opportunity to share the applicable regulations for the KIRO listeners and encourages the KIRO listeners to share any remaining concerns with the Snoqualmie Gaming Commission as part of the established gaming dispute process.*

*Snoqualmie Casino Management Team"*

The most applicable part of this statement to the complaint from poker players is that Snoqualmie establishes that they are in compliance with applicable gambling regulations and that they think only one-third of the jackpot will end up not going back to the poker players from which it was funded. However, that's the rub for the poker players.

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Songer, with the state Gambling Commission, says this is a good lesson for anyone who might consider gambling.

“Since the tribal casinos do operate a little bit differently than our commercial card rooms we generally suggest that players ask questions when participating in jackpots at these tribal casinos. They should definitely ask them what will happen to the funds if for some reason the jackpot is discontinued.”

Newman says the reason he plays poker is because he likes puzzles. This is just one puzzle, it seems, he won't be able to solve. While he says he won't be returning to Snoqualmie Casino to play poker he will still keep playing because, despite the hand he's been dealt here, he still loves the game.

“It feels, um, haha, you kind of feel like the smartest man in the world – for a moment! Until you get it wrong and then you're like 'I'm the dumbest man in the world' you know,” Newman said.

The total for the Snoqualmie Casino player-supported jackpot dwindled to \$29,863 by the afternoon of Aug. 1. The poker room shut down at 5 p.m. on Aug. 2.

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