

By BOB JOHNSON

MONTGOMERY, Ala.

Officials at a closed casino challenged Gov. Bob Riley's illegal gambling task force Tuesday to arrest its developer to finally determine if the casino's electronic bingo machines violated the law.

"If that's what it takes to get this before a

jury of my peers, by all means arrest me," Ronnie Gilley said. "Tell them to come put the handcuffs on me."

Sam Cherry, attorney for the Country Crossing casino, said the Dothan casino has been closed for nine months under threat of a raid by Riley's task force, leaving about 1,000 workers mostly unemployed. But he said no court has found electronic bingo at Dothan or in other locations around the state to be against the local law and that a case should be taken before a jury.

Gilley, Cherry and other Country Crossing officials and supporters initially discussed the issue at a news conference at Gilley's office in Enterprise Tuesday morning.

Cherry said Country Crossing officials had experts inspect the electronic bingo machines before the casino opened last year and that officials had invited Riley to inspect the machines at the time.

Task force commander John Tyson said he would not allow Gilley to decide what the task force should do.

"In my experience, it's never a good idea to let those who break the law decide the prosecution's law enforcement strategy," Tyson said.

Tyson said Gilley had a chance to get his day in court earlier this year when a judge issued a search warrant for state troopers to remove the machines, but instead Gilley closed and boarded up the casino.

In his statement, Tyson asked if Gilley was now willing to take the chains off the door and let investigators "seize illegal slot machines."

"Absolutely not," Gilley said.

He said the casino's 1,200 electronic bingo machines are all linked together so that people can play bingo at the same time, making the games in compliance with a Supreme Court ruling that defined bingo. Gilley and Cherry both said separating the machines would make it impossible to determine if they were in violation of the law.

Riley's task force has forced casinos in Macon, Lowndes and Greene counties to also close.

The two candidates for governor in the Nov. 2 election, Republican Robert Bentley and Democrat Ron Sparks have both said they would dismantle the task force if they are elected.

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