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Martinez says tribe agreed not to open gaming

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Fort Sill Apache Tribe members may have a difficult time beginning gaming if approval consideration makes it to the governor's desk.

On Tuesday, following Gov. Susana Martinez' speech to the Deming-Luna County Economic Development, Inc., group, she was asked if she supports the tribe's efforts to begin gaming at Akela, NM.

"No," she said before continuing, "Actually, we've met with folks in Washington, D.C. and they're very concerned that there is no agreement, there is no compact and in fact, when the land was placed into trust, there was a very specific agreement by them that they would not open gaming there."

When asked if the job creation figures offered by the tribe might influence her decision, she said what has influenced her decision happened before her time in office. The tribe has touted that it will create at least 245 direct and 56 indirect jobs if gaming is approved.

"What happened way before me, which is an agreement by the tribe that they would not be involved in gaming and that commitment they made to the U.S. government," she added.

Jeff Haozous, tribal chairman, was unable to be reached for comment before publication.

Following a technical scoping process, the tribe will submit an application to the federal government for approval. If approved, the application would then be sent to the governor for her approval to determine if it is in the best interests of the community, region and state.

During Tuesday's luncheon, held at the Special Events Center, Gov. Martinez spoke on state level economic development efforts that center on creating a more business-friendly environment while boosting education efforts.

She used the time to unveil a new program, "New Mexico Reads to Lead," that is designed to help struggling elementary school students read at a higher level.

The \$8.5 million dollar program will be broken into several components that will target about 100,000 students from grades kindergarten through third grade.

The funds will provide for professional development for educators, the hiring of 52 reading coaches throughout the state and assessment tools, among other items.

"Reading coaches will be on the job by the beginning of the school year in August," she said. Her speech also touched on bipartisan efforts in Santa Fe to reduce taxes and offer tax credits for employers that hire veterans returning from service overseas.

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