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Mohegan To Let Massachusetts Casino Workers Unionize



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Associated Press

3:50 p.m. EST, November 21, 2012

PALMER, Mass. — The Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority, vying to open a casino in western Massachusetts, has reached a deal with a federation of about 50 labor unions to allow future employees to form a union and negotiate contracts.

Mohegan finalized the agreement with the Pioneer Valley **AFL-CIO** to cover employees at a casino it wants to build on a 150-acre site just of the Massachusetts Turnpike in Palmer.

The Republican newspaper reports (<http://bit.ly/SRQtF1>) that the agreement could help the company win the only casino license designated for western Massachusetts, because under state law, the Massachusetts Gaming Commission must consider whether an applicant has a contract with organized labor, including hospitality services, and has the support of organized labor for its application when weighing its decision to award a license.

"The first jobs to be created from casino gaming in Massachusetts will be union jobs, and we're excited to bring that opportunity to western Mass. and the entire region," Mitchell Etess, chief executive officer of the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority, said in a statement. "By formalizing this commitment to the Pioneer Valley AFL-CIO, we recognize the importance of preserving worker rights to organize once our facility opens in Palmer."

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The authority also operates the Mohegan Sun casino in Connecticut and the Mohegan Sun at Pocono Downs in Pennsylvania.

At least three other companies are seeking rights to build a casino in the western part of the state. **Ameristar Casinos**, **Penn National Gaming** and MGM Resorts all have plans for a resort casino in Springfield.

The Mohegan authority's agreement marks the first of its kind for any

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casino developer in western Massachusetts, Mohegan officials said, although the authority and Ameristar have both previously signed deals with the Pioneer Valley Building and Construction Trades Council of Springfield and Carpenters Local 108 to help build proposed casinos.

The labor deal was welcomed by Palmer Town Council member Paul Burns, who saw it as a sign of commitment.

The state's gambling law allows up to three casinos in three distinct regions of the state. A casino would have to be approved by local voters and the state gambling commission.

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