

Pact on Pechanga casinos fails to win over unions

Sacramento – Labor unions Wednesday attacked a renegotiated gaming agreement with the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians near Temecula, alleging that the deal, known as a compact, lacks protections for casino workers.

A short while later, though, union leaders urged support for a nearly identical compact with the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians near Highland.

The distinction – the San Manuel tribe has a union agreement with hundreds of its employees while Pechanga does not – underscored a second day of intense testimony in a Senate committee hearing on compacts negotiated last summer between Gov. Schwarzenegger and five wealthy gaming tribes, four of them in Riverside or San Bernardino counties.

It also could determine which agreements the Legislature ratifies. The full Senate could consider the deals as early as next week.

Under the compacts, participating Inland tribes could add up to 19,500 slot machines in return for the tribes paying more money to the state.

Wednesday, Pechanga Chairman Mark Macarro said the agreement with his tribe would help the local economy and generate an extra USD 14 million for the state annually before slot machine are even installed.

The tribe plans to add 1,500 slot machines within five years, he said. The compact allows the tribe to have up to 7,500 slots.

Macarro said the tribe will not be pressured into accepting

parts of 2004 compacts that made it easier to unionize casino workers, even if means giving up a chance for more slot machines.

„Every tribe is uniquely situated. San Manuel went a different direction than we did,“ he said. „At any point in time, we’ve never felt like we were holding onto an agreement so tight that we couldn’t walk away. There are just certain lines that we won’t cross.“

San Manuel’s compact drew much less opposition Wednesday.

The tribe’s vice chairman, Vince Duro, said it is ready to install many of the additional 5,500 slot machines allowed under the deal.

„San Manuel is not a problem,“ said Michael Hartigan, the state president of the workers union that represents San Manuel employees

Leaders of a San Diego County tribe trying to build a casino in Barstow testified in favor of the San Manuel deal. But they used the opportunity to urge the Legislature to ratify their own gaming agreement, something opposed by the San Manuel and other Inland tribes.

„The rich are getting richer and the poor are getting the shaft,“ said Francine Cupsch, secretary of the tribal council of the Los Coyotes band.