

Florida Supreme Court overturns Seminole casino deal

The Florida Supreme Court has overturned an agreement Gov. Charlie Crist signed with the Seminole Tribe to allow Las Vegas-style slot machines, baccarat, black jack and other card games at its facilities, which include the Hard Rock casinos in Tampa and Hollywood.

The court ruled that Crist does not have the constitutional authority „to bind the state to a gaming compact that clearly departs from the state’s public policy by legalizing types of gaming that are illegal everywhere else in the state.“

The compact permits the tribe to upgrade from Class II bingo-like machines to Class III Las Vegas-style machines at its seven Florida casinos – and for the first time require the Seminoles to pay the state a portion of their gaming revenue. The agreement, over 25 years, also would permit the Seminoles to have exclusive rights in Florida for blackjack and baccarat.

House Speaker Marco Rubio challenged the deal after Crist signed it in November. The suit argued the agreement violated the Florida Constitution’s separation of powers clause, and encroaches on the Legislature’s law and policymaking authority. The suit noted that five other states’ high courts, in suits filed by legislatures, have ruled that „a governor may not unilaterally bind a state to a gaming compact“ with Indian tribes.

The U.S. Department of Interior, however, approved the deal in January, and the tribe has already given the state USD 50 million as part of the agreement, which was expected to generate at least USD 100 million a year.