

Foxwoods Continuing Fight Against Union Vote

By MARK PETERS | Courant Staff Writer

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Management at Foxwoods Resort Casino entered formal objections Monday to a union vote by table game dealers, asserting that federal labor law doesn't apply to the tribal casino while also claiming the election was tainted by union officials who engaged in unlawful tactics.

The objections, filed with the National Labor Relations Board office in Hartford, challenge the results of a federally supervised election Nov. 24. Foxwoods' blackjack, poker and other table game dealers voted to have the United Auto Workers union represent them.

The dealers would be the first Foxwoods employees to unionize. The vote has national significance, since it is believed to be the first NLRB-supervised union election at a tribal casino.

If the NLRB rejects Foxwoods' objections, the casino has another avenue for challenge: Casino management can refuse to bargain with the newly certified unit, sending the dispute into federal appellate courts.

Leaders of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe, which owns and operates Foxwoods, indicated the issue is probably headed in that direction.

"In light of what is at stake for all of Indian country, we must pursue this and it will require an appeal to the federal courts," said Tribal Chairman Michael J. Thomas in a letter circulated by the tribe.

In its objections, Foxwoods repeated the argument it has made throughout the organizing process: Federal labor law doesn't apply to casino employees because the tribe is a sovereign nation. Union organizing should instead take place under recently adopted tribal laws.

Attorneys for the casino also accused the UAW of "unlawfully harassing, threatening and intimidating" dealers and making "threats of bodily harm" to affect the outcome of the election. They also claimed the NLRB should have provided ballots in more than one language.

Attorney General Richard Blumenthal said the accusations were groundless.

"Broad claims of impropriety are easily made — but no specific facts or evidence have been

provided to support them," Blumenthal said.

The UAW said that Foxwoods management should respect the majority vote and begin negotiating instead of spending millions of dollars fighting the results.

The NLRB said the size of the bargaining unit will be 2,600 workers.

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