

# EDITORIAL: BIA, National Indian Gaming Commission allowed Chukchansi crisis to get out of control

By The Fresno Bee Editorial Board



The Chukchansi casino is closed until a tribal dispute and other issues are resolved.

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The leadership factions in the Chukchansi casino dispute want the closed Madera County gambling operation opened as quickly as possible so the 900 tribal members can receive their slices of a monthly payout totaling \$1 million.

But federal and state authorities who finally intervened years late in this long-standing battle over control of the casino and its profits should proceed with diligence and caution — not with their eyes on the clock.

This mess likely will require many months, if not a year, to properly investigate and untangle so future patrons don't have to worry about their safety or being ordered out of the casino with their winnings left behind on the gaming tables.

Moreover, it's important that those responsible for regulating Indian gaming send a clear message to other tribal casinos in California and across the nation that they will not tolerate the rioting and attempted armed takeovers among rivals that have occurred at Chukchansi at least twice since 2012, most recently Thursday night.

Clearly, some tribal members don't care about people who gamble and dine there. Otherwise, they would have

engaged in peaceful attempts to settle their differences instead of behaving like thugs.

The fact that the Chukchansi Gold Resort & Casino website, as of Monday, didn't mention the place is closed indefinitely suggests the tribe and casino management care little about their customers.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs and the National Indian Gaming Commission bear responsibility for allowing matters at Chukchansi to spiral out of control. The bureau's reluctance to intervene in the tribe's longstanding leadership disputes was inexcusable. The NIGC, meanwhile, allowed the casino to miss a financial audit deadline for 18 months before finally getting tough and threatening to shutter operations.

Now that the Golden Goose has been yanked from their hands, the parties to this dispute will say the right things, promise to get along and lobby hard to open the casino quickly.

Regulators would be wise to ignore their pleas and do what is necessary to ensure that there are no more riots, beatings and armed confrontations in the casino or on its grounds. That much, at least, is owed to the casino's customers.

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