

Connecticut Courts to Hear Trump Suit Vs. Easterns

By The Associated Press

HARTFORD, Conn. - A federal judge has ruled that lawsuits filed by a Burlington investor and real estate mogul Donald Trump over development of a planned Eastern Pequot casino will be heard in state court.

U.S. District Judge Robert N. Chatigny's decision comes as Congress begins to investigate whether outside investors intent on building casinos are inappropriately influencing the federal recognition of Indian tribes.

Trump and J.D. DeMatteo say they have a binding contract with the Eastern Pequots assuring them of a role in the North Stonington tribe's economic development plans, including a casino. They allege that competing investors "hijacked" the tribe with payoffs and other unlawful activities.

Trump's lawsuit accuses Southport golf course developer David Rosow and Palm Beach millionaire industrialist William Koch of coercing some Eastern Pequot leaders to get rid of Trump as the tribe's developer.

Trump did not return a call seeking comment.

The ruling "is a victory for us. We are very pleased," Robert Reardon, an attorney for Trump, told The Hartford Courant on Thursday. "I spoke with Mr. Trump yesterday and he is totally committed to this lawsuit. He lived up to his obligations under that contract."

Thomas Kokoska, a lawyer for DeMatteo, said DeMatteo and Trump have fulfilled their responsibilities under the contract.

"Now the defendants must live up to their obligations and follow the laws of the land," Kokoska said.

DeMatteo was out of state and not available for comment.

Trump and DeMatteo filed their lawsuits in state Superior Court, but Rosow and Koch appealed to Chatigny to move the cases to federal court under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Chatigny rejected that request in a decision released Wednesday, which attorneys said will mean the case will be heard much more quickly and be considered as a more straightforward breach-of-contract case.

"We don't care one way or the other," Rosow said. "We thought it would be useful to have it in federal court. If it is in state court, then so be it."

"There is no question (Trump) is a world-class hotel developer, but his casinos just haven't done it," Rosow added, referring to Trump's recent financial troubles.

Brad Goldstein, a Koch spokesman in Florida, declined to comment about the case.

The Eastern Pequots won federal recognition from the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 2002. The state is appealing the BIA's decision.

Over the past decade, Trump and DeMatteo had been financing the efforts of one faction, the Paucatuck Eastern Pequots, spending more than \$14 million on lawyers, genealogists, historians and anthropologists. Rosow and Koch had been supporting the other Eastern Pequot faction.

The newly united Easterns dumped Trump and DeMatteo a year ago. Both men are seeking hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation or reinstatement as casino developers for the tribe.

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