

Dear Friend,

Wednesday was a historic day for Florida. I joined Mitchell Cypress, Chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, to sign a compact that has the potential to provide billions of dollars to Florida's schools.

As you may know, the federal government threatened to issue procedures this week allowing the Seminole Tribe to operate slot machines at their existing facilities. While some may argue that the federal government could not force Florida to accept gambling on tribal land, I did not have the luxury of waiting for the case to play out in the courts. That was a gamble I was not willing to take.

The federal government has made its position clear. It believes that, as a result of the Class III gaming authorized by constitutional amendment, the tribe has the right to engage in similar activity on their lands. As early as today, the federal government was prepared to grant the tribe the unlimited right to do so without requiring any benefit whatsoever to the people of Florida. I believe it would have been irresponsible to let that happen.

Therefore, I authorized my staff to enter into negotiations with the tribe to achieve three main goals: maximizing the revenue the state receives, minimizing the future expansion of gambling activity, and ensuring appropriate safeguards are in place to protect our consumers. I believe the gaming compact signed yesterday achieves all three goals.

Because the federal government is prepared to give slot machines to the Seminoles with no benefit to the State, we had to offer the tribe something more in return. In return for the right to operate slot machines and banked card games in the seven existing facilities on tribal lands, the Seminole Tribe has offered to pay the State a significant portion of its earned revenue. The benefits of this portion of the compact are twofold. It will provide much-needed revenue the Legislature can appropriate to worthy programs like education, and it provides a significant disincentive for the future expansion of gambling in other areas of Florida due to the resulting loss of guaranteed revenue that would occur.

The compact does not dictate how the funds received by the state should be spent. The Florida Constitution gives the power of the purse to the Florida Legislature. However, I recommend that the majority of the funds – up to 95 percent – be dedicated to the education of Florida's children. I have also recommended that the Legislature designate a smaller portion to local governments near the tribal lands to assist with increased economic activity, tourism and anticipated ancillary development likely to occur.

The compact will also require independent annual financial audits, a process for redressing injuries caused to patrons and a strong commitment to a compulsive gambling prevention program. In light of the complex relationship among the Indian Tribes and federal, state and local governments, I believe these are significant steps toward protecting the safety and welfare of the people of Florida.

I certainly understand that my signing of this compact will not please everyone, but I hope you will agree that we have done our absolute best to balance all of the competing needs and desires of both the people of Florida and the people of the Seminole Tribe of Florida.

May God continue to bless the people of Florida and the people of the Seminole Tribe,

*Charlie Crist*