

To speed up legislative process, governor issued two hands, flashlight – Page D

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## As calls for parity increase, tribal retailers find themselves struggling to give a shit

By A. Bill Murray, Partisan Staff Reporter

If you listen closely, a new refrain can be heard echoing across the plains of Oklahoma, bubbling up from the streams and carried on the whisper of the wind.

"That's not fair."

It's a phrase Joseph Coffey knows all too well. As proprietor of Joe's Smoke Stop outside of Tecumseh, the Citizen Pottawatomie tobacco merchant hears it all the time from his non-tribal competitors.

This legislative session has already seen the passage of Gov. Brad Henry's controversial gambling expansion bill, which allows Indian casinos to expand their gaming operations. Furthermore, the governor's cigarette tax proposal has raised opposition from non-tribal tobacco retailers, who say that the bill will put them at a disadvantage compared to their Indian counterparts.

The effects of tribal sovereignty have created an unequal playing field, leaving non-tribal businesses fighting to compete and tribal merchants struggling to give a rat's ass.

Fischer's Tobacco Shacky has been the Bartlesville for generations, ever since the Cherokees were displaced so that white people could drill for oil. "I grew up in an Oklahoma with one flag, and I don't think it's fair that we say some people can do some things and some people can't."

Things are tough all over: As Fischer work to remain profitable, tribal dealers such as Coffey fight to give a good goddamn.

"It's hard," notes Coffey, who says he sometimes feels guilty for his inability to feel sorry for the little pussies. "I guess we've really forgotten what it's like to be treated unfairly. I guess the 200 years of ass-ramming by federal and state governments made us overlook the suffering of the guy who owns the Love's in Purcell" he said.

Coffey is not alone; Indian officials across the state spend countless seconds trying to feel sympathy for non-tribal tobacco dealers, only to find that they can't.

Tribal governments are working on the problem, and the Choctaw Nation has com-



Due to tribal sovereignty and tax exemptions, luxurious tribal smoke shops such as this one enjoy a price advantage. In the background, smoke rises from a mountain of broken treaties.

missioned the construction of the world's smallest violin, to be played exclusively for non-tribal cigarette dealers.

Choctaw official David Haines hopes the violin will ease relations by showing that Oklahoma's Indian population is sympathetic to its competition. "It must be hard to play at an unfair table," he said. "Almost as hard as it is to cope with sky-high rates of poverty, alcoholism and mental illness due to generations of oppression by foreign invaders."

Haines invited the jilted dealers to share their concerns. "Cry me a fuckin' river, crackers" he said.

In a recent meeting, the Absentee Shawnee tribe considering shedding a single, solitary tear for the people who forced them to leave their lands, marched them into Oklahoma, then took that land when oil was discovered. Supporters said the measure would show solidarity with other retailers, since it's not like American Indians discovered tobacco or anything.

Ultimately, the member rejected the measure in favor of laughing their asses off.

## Nobody really knows who amended HB 2355

OKLAHOMA CITY (OP) – State lawmakers admitted Tuesday that they had no idea who amended HB 2355, regarding performance awards issued by the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation.

The amendment added a new paragraph to the first section of the bill. As apparently approved, the paragraph reads "Metallica rules."

Rep. Lucky Lamons, D-Tulsa, author of the legislation, says he isn't sure when the amendment was added. "It might have been in the Appropriations Subcommittee on Public Safety," he said, "but I really don't remember."

Committee Chair Sen. Dick Wilkerson, D-Atwood, conceded that the amendment could have been approved during the meeting. "It was getting late, and I wanted to get home and watch 'Survivor,' so I think we pretty much approved everything on the table and went home."

House Minority Leader Todd Hiett, R-Kellyville wasted no time attacking the legislation. "This is typical of the Democrats 'bait-and-switch' policies," he said. "They did the same thing with tort reform and worker's compensation."

Legislators have declined to repeal the amendment. "I don't think it's hurting anything," said Lamons, "and besides, none of us are sure what a 'Metallica' is."

Under other provisions outlined in the bill, the ruling status of Metallica will be enforced by OSBI and the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics.

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