

Barbour says Mississippi casinos will surpass New Jersey

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GULFPORT, MS (WLOX) - The message at the Southern Gaming Summit on Thursday was a lot more than the comments convention delegates heard Wednesday. A day ago, casino executives said development in Mississippi was on hold indefinitely.

However, Governor Barbour countered that by saying he could picture a day in the not too distant future when Mississippi passes New Jersey as the country's second ranked casino market.

"I want to make sure that you know that not only am I as governor, but our state is very proud of our state," Barbour said as he opened his 14 minute talk at the Southern Gaming Summit.

Applause interrupted his speech just one time, when the governor looked into his crystal ball.

"My goal is for the day to come within the next few years where we pass New Jersey as the second ranked jurisdiction in the country. Where we pass Atlantic City," he said.

Many of the themes Barbour discussed simply reiterated what he promised in previous talks to this state. For instance, he spoke against Indian gaming expansion.

"We're not going to let somebody come open a casino in Jackson County that doesn't have to play by the rules you do," said the governor.

The governor reminded casino bosses that Mississippi has kept its pledge to leave their taxes alone and not to turn any thoughts that Mississippi would turn to a lottery to bolster its budget.

"It's one thing for us to license your industry. It's very different for the state to be out trying to sell to poor people," said Barbour.

The governor said his bet was that Mississippi would recover from the recession quicker than other states.

"I think we're going to be faster coming out of this recession. I don't think that's misplaced optimism."

Barbour credited that to industries like the gaming industry. So, he ended his speech by thanking the gaming industry for being a vital part of Mississippi's hurricane recovery efforts.

"I believe nothing has improved the image of Mississippi in my lifetime as much as our response, our response to Katrina," he said.