



## Local News

### Catawbas to argue for its gambling rights 9:03 AM

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Associated Press

ROCK HILL, S.C. -- The Catawba Indian Nation will argue before the state's high court on Wednesday that its 13-year-old land settlement with the state allows it to offer video gambling on its York County reservation.

The tribe won in a lower court, but the state is appealing. The state outlawed video gambling years ago and does not want to see the tribe bring it back.

"This is no different than everything that's happened to the tribe since the Europeans showed up," said Jay Bender, the tribe's lead attorney. "The goal has been to take what you can from the Indians and lie about it. That's exactly what is going on here."

The tribe's goal is not to open a video gambling operation. Rather the tribe wants to operate a high-stakes bingo game in Orangeburg County. But the state has not allowed that. The tribe wants the court to affirm its right to offer video gambling so it can use that as a bargaining chip with the state to get its bingo parlor near Interstate 95.

Opponents, however, fear that allowing a bingo operation in Orangeburg would open the door to more high-stakes bingo locations elsewhere in the state. The conservative Palmetto Family Council has said the gaming operation sought by the Catawbas would "change South Carolina forever."

Economic leaders in Orangeburg County want the bingo hall, saying it could bring hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars to the area.

The dispute's outcome is considered critical to the tribe's future. Since South Carolina began an lottery in 2002, the Catawbas say, their York County bingo hall has lost money. The Catawbas have since sold the hall and the surrounding property, formerly the old Rock Hill Mall, to a development group now building a grocery store on the site.

"We need to get down the road here," said tribal Chief Gilbert Blue. "We've spent thousands of dollars trying to defend ourselves when we should've been focused on trying to get some economic development going."

The justices will rule in the case later.