



CNIGA: Protecting the Sovereign Right of All Tribes to Have Gaming on Tribal Lands

by Daniel J. Tucker

It is with great honor and appreciation that I assume the chairmanship of the California Nations Indian Gaming Association (CNIGA) for a second term. I was humbled and overjoyed to be elected by a unanimous vote of the membership. I do not take this position lightly and vow to continue the important work of protecting the sovereign right of all tribes to have gaming on tribal lands.

The past two years have gone by fast but the association has made incredible progress. Membership is up, meetings are well attended, and we are finding common ground on many difficult issues.

Following the 1987 United States Supreme Court ruling in *California v. Cabazon*, several California tribes formed an association dedicated to figuring out how to exercise our inherent sovereign rights to have gaming on our own lands. Meetings of the association were held wherever possible. Over time the association grew and more and more tribes joined. Meetings became more frequent, meeting space grew, and agendas became more and more important. This was the birth of CNIGA.

From the beginning, this association was created and run by tribal leadership. Nothing has changed. The issues discussed, the positions taken and the policy set is done strictly by our tribal membership. The only way to influence the policy of the association is to become a member and participate in the ongoing dialogue. We welcome tribes of all sizes, from all parts of the state to join with us in our continued discussions relating to a vast array of topics that all affect our inherent sovereign rights to have gaming on our own lands.

One of the most critical issues facing tribal governments in the coming years will be Internet gaming. It is critical that tribal governments are actively engaged in the discussions happening both in Sacramento and in Washington D.C. CNIGA's member tribes have been studying this issue for several years and on June 23, 2011 the membership adopted a set of guiding principles related to Internet gambling legislation. The guiding principles contain positions relating to: tribal exclusivity for Class III gaming, enforcement and regulation, meaningful tribal participation and benefit. In addition, the principles oppose "functional casinos" from operating in private and public establishments, including bars, restaurants, unauthorized card rooms and internet cafes.

As we maneuver through the state and federal legislative process we will use these guiding principles, adopted by the CNIGA tribal membership, as directive for all positions taken. The coming year will bring many proposals, and CNIGA is

poised and ready to communicate the association's position.

Over the past several months CNIGA has been hosting a series of meetings for all California tribes to discuss the California tribal-state gaming compacts. We are looking forward to continuing these discussions well into 2012 where we will continue to work to find consensus on issues facing tribes in the compacting process. In 1999 CNIGA organized California tribes for the purpose of negotiating a tribal state gaming compact. At the end of those meetings, 61 tribes entered into historic agreements with the State of California. We learned then and there – when we are united together we are a powerful voice. I know this is possible again.

This work is not easy and will not happen overnight. Each member tribe is its own sovereign government faced with unique problems and important issues. Just as California itself is a diverse state, so too are our tribal governments. From the Tolowa Dee-ni, Pit River, Wintu, & Yana people of the North to the Luiseño, Kumeyaay, and Cahuilla people of the South, our culture, our language and our environments differ; however we all have the same fundamental goals – to protect our inherent sovereign governmental rights and provide a better future for the next seven generations.

It is critical for tribal leadership to recognize and respect the differences of our tribal brothers and sisters and use that knowledge to find common ground as we move forward. We must never forget the awesome power that comes from a unified group of tribes. We must never turn our back on protecting our sovereign rights. We must learn from the past and apply it to the future, wherever that may take us.

On January 31st, CNIGA will be hosting the 17th Annual Western Indian Gaming Conference (WIGC). This year's show is shaping up to be a great one. Seminar topics will include Internet Gaming, taxation, regulation, and technology. I am excited to report that the WIGC will include a sold out Mini Expo where industry professionals will be exhibiting the latest in casino manufacturing, seating, technology services and more. I would like to thank all of our conference sponsors. Revenues raised at the WIGC help to fund the associations work to protect the Indian gaming industry. *For more information about the Western Indian Gaming Conference, visit www.wigc2012.com.* ♣

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