



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

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“Indian Gaming ‘08” Information: www.indiangaming.org

“INDIAN GAMING ‘08” OPENS AT THE SAN DIEGO CONVENTION CENTER 17th Annual Meeting and Trade Show of the National Indian Gaming Association

SAN DIEGO, Calif., April 21 – Tribal government gaming has blossomed into a \$27 billion industry in the 20 years since passage of federal legislation opening the regulatory doors to casinos on American Indian lands.

But tribal leaders and gaming industry delegates attending the National Indian Gaming Association’s (NIGA) 17th annual meeting and trade show, which began today, were warned to be diligent against political attacks on Native sovereignty and economy independence.

“Can you imagine what we have been allowed to do in the last 20 years?” NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens Jr. said in his annual address at the San Diego Convention Center. “But we can’t afford to rest. There are too many tribes that continue to struggle. We have to stand strong and stay together. We have to stand united.”

This year’s event commemorates passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) of 1988, which was passed by Congress the year after the U.S. Supreme Court recognized the right of Indian tribes to engage in gaming on tribal lands as a means of strengthening their governments and economies.

Former Sen. Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., a citizen of the Northern Cheyenne Nation, reminded delegates that IGRA merely provided a regulatory framework for casinos on tribal lands and that it was the inherent right of tribes as governments to engage in gaming as a means of achieving economic independence.

He scoffed at congressional attempts to increase regulation of the industry. “We’re already regulated more than Nevada, more than Atlantic City,” Campbell said. “We don’t need more regulation. We’re doing just fine.”

Campbell and former Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., praised Native nations for strengthening their political presence on Capitol Hill, guarding against legislative attacks on tribal sovereignty from anti-gaming forces and others opposed to tribal self-governance.

Daschle recommended that tribes continue the fight against efforts to over-regulate the industry. He hailed efforts to develop a nationwide tribal economy that encourages inter-tribal business ventures such as the Seminole Tribe of Florida, which is selling beef products to other tribes.

The former Senate Democratic Major Leader also encouraged tribes to diversify their economy, particularly into the area of renewable energy production, which he predicted will soon become a trillion-dollar industry. “Can you imagine if tribes generated 10 percent of that?” he asked.

Thousands of delegates are attending this year's NIGA meeting, convention and trade show, which will showcase 500 vendors and exhibitors representing all aspects of the gaming and hospitality industries. The exhibit floor opens on Tuesday morning and the event runs through Wednesday.

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The National Indian Gaming Association is a non-profit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other non-voting associate members. The common commitment and purpose of NIGA is to advance the lives of Indian people – economically, socially and politically. NIGA operates as a clearinghouse and educational, legislative and public policy resource for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development.