



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING HOSTS LEADERS FROM INDIAN COUNTRY, *Tribal Sovereignty challenges a recurring theme for year ahead*

PHOENIX, AZ – APRIL 14, 2009 – The call to tribal leaders to make a unified stand to oppose recent US government and Supreme Court decisions that eroded away at tribal sovereignty was a recurring theme many times during the membership meeting. The importance of influential organizations that represent Indian interests in collaborating on forging a single, strong message was also emphasized by the leadership. Joe Garcia, President of the National Congress of the American Indian (NCAI) spoke to the crucial nature of tribes being recognized by the US government as entities that need to be engaged in “a Nation to Nation dialogue” and assented to the assertion that Tribal leaders and the organizations that represent them should “work together” in support of Indian self-reliance. Both NIGA Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr. and President Garcia supported the concept of having both NIGA and NCAI discuss with tribal leaders presenting one message to US Congressional leaders and President Obama that would accurately and effectively represent Indian concerns on self determination. Mark Van Norman, executive director of NIGA, echoed these sentiments, “the only time that we (Indian people) are strong on Indian sovereignty is when we stand together... Our sovereignty comes from our wills to self-govern from the days before the United States government even came into being.” Bernadine Burnette, Vice President of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation concurred, “We need to present a united front.” Thomas Beauty, Chairman of the Yavapai Apache Nation alluded to the importance of sovereignty as it relates to Indian gaming during his welcome remarks when he said, “Our generation is different. We don’t have steel mills, or a lot of manufacturing... gaming has given us equity with the rest of the country.”

Challenges facing tribes that were addressed came with resolutions passed from the executive board to the general membership meeting. One of these issue areas was standing in opposition to the February 2009 Supreme Court decision in *Carcieri v. Salazar*, wherein the Court held that the Secretary of the Interior lacks the authority to take land into trust under the Indian Reorganization Act for Indian tribes

that were not under Federal jurisdiction at the time of its passage in 1934. Another priority challenge was a resolution to oppose the Employee Free Choice Act unless it is amended to treat Indian tribes as governments under this act and the National Labor Relations Act, which could potentially unravel FDR “New Deal” policies and thereby disallow tribes from being treated in the manner of independent governments with regard to labor policies. Both NIGA and NCAI had presented separate draft language for resolutions with regard to the Employee Free Choice Act for members to consider, and testimony on impacts to Indian country were given by guests US Representatives Buck McKeon (R-AZ), ranking member of the Education and Labor Committee, and Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Co-Chair of the Native American Caucus.

The membership meeting was followed by the Chairman’s Award Luncheon, with the keynote address given by former US Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who also emphasized that tribal governments need to leverage their relationships with members of the House and Senate who recognize that their elections depended upon support from tribal constituents.

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About the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) - The National Indian Gaming Association is a nonprofit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other nonvoting associate member. The mission 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 resources for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development. For more information, visit www.indiangaming.org.