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Media Release

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NIGA MOURNS THE PASSING OF S. TIMOTHY WAPATO PAST NIGA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FROM 1993-1998

WASHINGTON, DC –April 20, 2009- The National Indian Gaming Association mourns the passing of S. Timothy Wapato, past Executive Director of NIGA from (1993 to 1998), on April 19, 2009.

NIGA Chairman Ernest L. Stevens, Jr., said, “Tim Wapato was a man of vision, a true warrior for Indian nations. As a member of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, love for Indian peoples and respect for our sovereignty was deeply ingrained in his heart. And, he was a man of action, who put himself on the frontline and made his vision a reality. He was a champion for us all and will always be remembered for his leadership.”

At NIGA, Wapato was known for fighting tough battles in the mid-1990s to maintain the United States’ respect for Indian nations as sovereigns. He instilled in all around him the vision that, “Tribal sovereignty is non-negotiable, and treatment of Indian Tribes as governments is the only acceptable outcome.” With then NIGA Chairman Rick Hill and Indian tribes across the country, Wapato was a key player in coordinating the fight to preserve the status of tribal government revenues as sovereign funds free from Federal and state taxation. In Wapato’s view, sovereign Indian nation revenues are fully accounted for through our own essential tribal government purposes: police and fire protection, education, health care, housing, child and elder care, transportation, water and sanitation services, and cultural revitalization. As he saw it, there is no more room for Federal taxation of tribal government revenues than there is for tribal government taxation of Federal revenues.

Chairman Rick Hill Oneida Tribe of Wisconsin said, “Tim was a spiritual master sent to us from the creator. He was a brilliant teacher; philosopher, visionary and he used humor to tell the truth. Tim led the way to protect our inherent sovereign right as indigenous people.”

Tim Wapato dedicated his career in Washington, D.C. to educating members of Congress and the Senate about tribal governments, tribal culture, and Indian gaming. Wapato said, “Our purpose in life is to dispel ignorance, and it looks like we’ll never be out of a job.” He knew that Indian gaming is a path for tribal governments to control our own destinies. In his view, Indian gaming provided the resources essential for true self-determination.

Tim Wapato is also known for his government service as Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, where he made Federal support for tribal self-governance a priority. Tim served as the U.S. Commissioner for the Pacific Salmon Treaty Commission

and Executive Director of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission. Prior to that, he served for 21 years in the Los Angeles Police Department, retiring as a Lieutenant.

Tim Wapato found happiness in his marriage and partnership with Gay Kingman-Wapato, a member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. (Gay is the former Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians and award-winning Public Relations Director of NIGA.) The two were inseparable and often wore matching, hand made Native American outfits, reflecting Indian art and culture.

We send our deepest prayers, sympathy and condolences to Gay Kingman-Wapato and the Kingman-Wapato family.

NIGA will update you with information on where to send flowers and services when available.

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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.