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Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

NATIONAL INDIAN GAMING ASSOCIATION HOSTS SUCCESSFUL 2010 MID YEAR CONFERENCE

Prior Lake, MN – October 27, 2010 - Last week at the Mystic Lake Hotel Casino, the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) hosted its largest ever Mid-Year Conference, with over 400 tribal leaders, tribal regulators and Indian gaming industry professionals in attendance. Most of the energy centered around Internet gambling, the Carcieri legislation and Indian land-into-trust issues.

Tribal leaders received the latest updates on Internet gambling legislation, the I-gaming industry developments, and the opportunities and challenges that Internet gambling poses for Indian gaming. At the end of two days of internet seminars, panels and discussions, tribal leaders adopted a NIGA Resolution on Internet gambling that calls for respect for Indian sovereignty in any Internet gambling legislation.

Another top priority discussed by tribal leaders is the Carcieri [legislation](#) and related land-into-trust issues. Many [tribal leaders are calling for action](#) by Congress to enact a “clean” Carcieri [bill](#), without legislative riders. Some expressed a view that the “commutability policy” of the Kempthorne Interior Department must be withdrawn. Others called for a balanced approach by the Department of the Interior in any amendments to the IGRA Section 20 regulations. [This issue is sure to be](#) at the forefront of Indian policy [as we close out the legislative year](#).

The highlight of the two-day conference was the National Indian Gaming Association’s 12th Annual Sovereignty Awards Banquet. The banquet is in honor of John Keiffer, who was a champion of Indian sovereignty rights and dedicated member the NIGA Executive Committee from 1993 until his untimely death in 1999.

This year’s John Keiffer Award honoree was Myra Pearson, Chairwoman of the Spirit Lake Nation in North Dakota and Chairwoman of the Great Plains Indian Gaming Association. Pearson was honored for her leadership and commitment to Indian country. In her leadership capacities Pearson has continued to be a champion for Native American issues in the Great Plains region.

Upon receiving her award, Pearson told the crowd, “Here is a little advice: Fight for what you believe in. Fight for our people and for sovereignty. We have battles and everyday is a challenge. Our reward is the progress we make for our people.”

In addition, The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community presented a check to NIGA in the amount of \$325,000, which is part of a \$1 million matching grant targeting the construction of the NIGA headquarters building expansion project. Included in the presentation was recognition of other tribes who heeded the call of the Shakopee through their matching grant, including: the Miami Tribe of Oklahoma; the Soboba Band of Mission Indians in California; the Jicarilla Apache Nation in New Mexico; the Mohegan Tribe; and the Tule River Nation in Washington.

“We are committed to enhancing the strength of our presence on Capitol Hill. Our headquarters has always been minutes away from Congress and with this planned building expansion we can continue to build upon our presence on the frontlines.” Said Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr. “It is because of the continued support of the tribal leadership who are committed to protecting tribal sovereignty that this expansion is one step closer to reality.” Stevens credited the former leadership of NIGA. “They saw the importance of providing a strong presence in the early days of the National Indian Gaming Association and seized the opportunity in securing our headquarters that neighbor Congress. This foresight is part of the bigger picture that has allowed us to continue to move our mission forward on behalf of Indian Country.”

Shakopee Mdewankanton Sioux Community Chairman Stanley Crooks said, “I really encourage all of our membership at NIGA to step forward and make this beautiful building a reality for the future leaders that will walk the halls of Congress. We’ll need these facilities to continue to maintain our ability to convince the legislature to be supportive of Indian gaming because it’s the right thing to do and we’ve all proven that it can be successful.”

During the NIGA Membership Meeting, tribes heard updates and legislative reviews from many, including Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN), Tracy Stevens, Chairwoman of the National Indian Gaming Commission and Jamie Fullmer, CEO of Blue Stone Strategy, and the American Indian Business Network.

NIGA also released the Internet gaming economic impact studies and hosted several panel discussions in Internet gaming by tribal leaders and experts in the industry.

Based on the comprehensive overview and its possible impacts on Indian gaming, the NIGA Member Tribes unanimously adopted a resolution calling for any Internet gaming legislation to respect Indian sovereignty by meeting the following criteria:

- Indian tribes are sovereign governments with a right to regulate and license Internet gaming and to offer such gaming to customers on Indian lands and other locales where Internet gaming is not criminally prohibited;
- Any legislation must not tax Indian tribes because that violates the Federal government-to-government relationship with tribal governments and must respect the existing relationship between the Department of the Interior, the NIGC, and Indian tribes;
- Existing tribal government rights under Tribal-State Compacts and IGRA must be respected; and
- Internet Gaming Legislation must not open up IGRA for amendments.

The NIGA Mid-year conference also included the Leadership Luncheon where Congressman Tom Cole (R-OK) provided the keynote address. He gave a legislative overview of the last two years related to Indian Country and commended the Tribal Leadership for their work on Capitol Hill. “You continue to be involved, you have participated and you have been active.” Cole continued, “There are some big issues related to Indian country and it is important to continue to defend with intensity. If we do not preserve the basic principles of sovereignty I promise you that the future of many of our tribes will never have the chance to take control of their own destiny and have a decent life.”

Congressman Cole ended his address by thanking NIGA and the Member Tribes. “Thank you for what you do as an industry, the money you put back into Indian Country, for the lives you change for the better and for the opportunities you create. When you advocate for your own interests, you essentially advocate for all of Indian Country, even the tribes that can’t be there and can’t afford the voice and influence you have. You do more good than you know.”

During the luncheon, Chairman Stevens honored the NIGA Associate Member driven White Earth Mission project for their housing repair assistance on the White Earth Tribe in Northern Minnesota. He also presented the Chairman’s Leadership Awards in Excellence to the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community, Barona Band of Mission Indians and the Morongo Band of Mission Indians for their dedication to protecting Mother Earth by establishing environmentally conscious gaming and business facilities. Chairman Stevens also hosted a Memorandum of Agreement signing ceremony with the Native American Tourism of Wisconsin (NATOW) organization that will establish a general framework to promote tourism featuring Native American heritage and culture while incorporating the opportunities for tribes to diversify their economies through gaming enterprises in Indian country.

“The success of the Mid Year gathering did not happen by accident. It is due to the commitment of the Indian country leadership who continue to be dedicated, organized and diligent about the Indian country agenda at hand. Whether it is about Internet Gaming, regulation or promoting the importance of voting in the upcoming elections, we know the success of Indian Country relies upon the unity of the Tribal Leadership to make an impact on issues affecting our people. It is something we take very seriously.” Chairman Stevens concluded.

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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.