



Rebuilding  
Communities  
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# Media Release

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### **NIGA CHAIRMAN DISCUSSES EVOLUTION OF INDIAN GAMING AT GLOBAL GAMING EXPO 2008**

**LAS VEGAS, NV., NOVEMBER 19, 2008** - National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) Chairman, Ernest L. Stevens, served as one of four keynote speakers on a panel entitled, "State of the Industry: The Evolution of Global Gaming", at the 2008 Global Gaming Expo held at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas, Nevada.

The Global Gaming Expo (G2E) is an annual industry trade show and conference event that draws over 30,000 gaming industry professionals to Las Vegas for opportunities to explore and discuss the latest innovations and future direction of the global gaming community.

President and CEO of the American Gaming Association, Frank Fahrenkoph, Jr., served as the moderator for the popular "State of the Industry" keynote panel. In addition to Stevens, Armin Karu, chairman of the management board for Olympic Entertainment Group; Thomas (T.J.) Matthews, chairman, president, CEO and COO of International Gaming Technology (IGT); and Gary Loveman, chairman, CEO and president of Harrah's Entertainment, Inc., also participated as panelists in the discussion.

As one of the leading industry executives in the gaming industry, Stevens spoke about the current state of Indian gaming and its future direction. Of particular interest to the panel was the impact that the upcoming Obama administration will have on Indian gaming.

"We're really excited about the new administration. Indian country came out in record numbers to participate in the voting process," said Stevens. "We are really committed to being a part of rejuvenating our economies. Indian country knows firsthand about the challenges of rebuilding, and history shows that Native America has always accepted their role in helping this country. We will continue to strive to rebuild Indian Country and we are committed to being a

part of getting America back on its feet. Indian Country is counting on the new administration to help us move our critical agenda forward."

With the recent 20th anniversary of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA), the focus of the panel shifted to debate throughout Washington D.C., and Indian Country on whether or not the Act needed to be amended to reflect the expansion and progress that Indian gaming has seen in the 20 years since the Act was passed. Often hailed as a "victory" for Indian tribes, Stevens was quick to point out that the Act also delegated new authority to the Federal government. "Indian Country has been involved in economic development; gaming being only one element, since long before there was even a United States of America." Stevens said.

"While we respect the laws passed by Congress, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act was a diminishment of tribal sovereignty and is nothing to celebrate. We celebrated the affirmation of sovereignty in the *Morongo and Cabazon* ruling from the Supreme Court. Unfortunately, Congress thought it necessary to scale back that ruling. Nevertheless, there are a great leaders who have since gone to the spirit world who would look upon tribal leadership and would be proud of what we've done under the limitations created by this Law (IGRA)," said Stevens. "But again, those same leaders fought very strong against IGRA and at the same time worked for the last twenty years to make the best of it. So for those who may feel IGRA legitimized gaming or those who would celebrate the IGRA, we offer this clarification. We celebrate what Sovereign governments have done with tribal government gaming in spite of limitation set forth in the law. Further if anything was legitimized when it comes to tribal government gaming; it was the *Morongo and Cabazon* decision that clarified our rights as tribal governments."

Chairman Stevens, continued, "As far as any celebration goes it is appropriate to recognize the tremendous things that have been done over the last twenty years in Indian country. He added, "Further, while we are proud of what Indian country has accomplished we are hesitant to claim victory or rest on our work because too many of our people continue to be denied their basic rights to engage in economic development through gaming, and many tribes continue to suffer economically, as a result of decades of poor government policy and promises."

Responding to questions regarding concerns over attempts to amend the Act, Stevens said, "We have a resolution that was established by a working group comprised of NIGA and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest and largest Indian organization. Tribal leaders participating in that process overwhelmingly voiced their opposition to any amendments to the Act."

Stevens added, "Indian country met at least 16 times in taskforce mode in Washington D.C. and all throughout Indian country and today we continue to maintain the positions adopted in the resolutions. Any changes to our policy would require a new series of high level Tribal leadership dialogue."

When asked about the future goals of Indian gaming in light of the current economic shakeup, Stevens responded, "Collaboration between tribes and more financial responsibility

are the key objectives to maintaining our economy. "We've done a lot of to make sure that we have solid, sound operations. [Tribes] know that we're not exempt from this economy and we're very concerned about that. We know when you take from tribal government gaming, you take directly from the schools, from our government operations, and our ability to serve our people".

Several years ago NIGA established the American Indian Business Network (AIBN) to be a means to empower native-owned businesses, strengthen communities and work towards developing a true Indian economy. "What we are trying to do is get tribes working with tribes in order to enhance our economic influence in Indian country." Stevens said.

"One example [of this] is at the Firerock Casino on the Navajo Nation. The casino was completely financed by the Navajo Nation. It is completely managed by the Navajo Nation and they created 200 new jobs, 95% of which are Navajo, therefore Navajo will reap the economic benefits of this opportunity. While this is a true example of what we really need to do more of in Indian country, we know that we will also build upon our relationship outside of Indian country as well."

Stevens concluded, "We know we have a lot of work ahead of us, whether it is with our ongoing operations throughout Indian country or with Tribes who are still trying to find some kind of economic source, tribes working with tribes is a key necessity. We know that whether we are branching out throughout Indian country or out into all elements of the business world, we have to continue to be diligent, professional and we must work together.

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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](http://www.indiangaming.org).