



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Deana Jackson
(202) 579-5427
djackson@indiangaming.org

STATEMENT ON THE PASSING OF CHIEF PHILLIP MARTIN OF THE MISSISSIPPI BAND OF CHOCTAW INDIANS



Chairman Stevens with
Chief Phillip Martin at the
Indian Gaming Tradeshow
in 2005

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Friday, February 5, 2010 - Chief Phillip Martin of the Mississippi Band of Choctaw – one of the most respected and beloved Indian country leaders, passed away last night. Chief Martin had suffered a stroke earlier this week. He was 83. He will be missed.

When we think of Chief Martin, we think – Visionary, Warrior, Leader, Dignitary, Diplomat, and Economic Powerhouse. For 50 years, Chief Martin dedicated himself to public service and he served as Chief of the Mississippi Choctaw for almost 30 years.

When he returned home after serving 10 years in the Air Force, his people were living in poverty, with little or no community infrastructure. Chief Martin determined to build an economy and set out to establish auto parts and defense manufacturing, government contracting, publishing, retail, tourism, golfing and Indian gaming. The Mississippi Band of Choctaw employs more than 6,000 people, which makes it one of the largest employers in the state. His success was so outstanding that the Choctaw economic development plan was known as the “Miracle in Mississippi.”

One of his most enduring legacies is the empowerment of his people. Chief Martin developed a plan to provide every Choctaw student with the opportunity for a college education funded by a Choctaw college scholarship.

Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr., said, “Chief Martin earned respect for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw as one of our original American democracies and he was a Champion of Indian sovereignty. He always worked to create Indian opportunity and to ensure respect for Indian sovereignty. He improved the lives of Indian people throughout the Nation.”

“He was one of the most important mentors in my life. He was an American legend.”

Our deepest sympathy goes out to his family. Chief Martin is married to Bonnie Kate Bell, who retired after 52 years with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He is survived by his wife, daughters Deborah Lewis and Patricia Gibson, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

###