

# The tide of Indian gambling begins to turn

In the 15 years since its passage, the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act has flooded America with gambling, pitting tribes against states, states against communities, tribes against tribes and greed against cultures — but the tide is finally beginning to turn.

Interior Secretary Gale Norton has finally called for an internal review of the federal tribal recognition process, and Congressional hearings are likely to be underway this summer to revise the fatally flawed Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA).

In January, our organization wrote to President George Bush, calling for a moratorium on illegitimate tribal recognitions and off-reservation casinos. We pointed out, “The Bureau of Indian Affairs has transformed itself into a national facilitator for the uncontrolled and inexcusable proliferation of casino gambling. No longer concerned with the true health and welfare of Native Americans or their neighbors, the bureau has become a clearing house for unsubstantiated tribal recognition and circumvention of states’ rights and laws.”

The “last straw” was the “Christmas Eve Surprise” when the BIA granted land in trust to the Jena Bend of Choctaw Indians for a casino in Louisiana without allowing hearings and procedures promised to Louisiana citizens.

It was one of a litany of outrageous activities involving Indian gambling.

- The BIA granted tribal recognition to the Schaghticoke tribe in Connecticut, touching off a firestorm of protest from Connecticut’s congressional delegation and the state’s Attorney General. A BIA internal memo admitted the tribe did not meet at least two crucial federal guidelines for recognition, but described how the tribe could be recognized anyway. A federal investigation is underway, trying to determine if wealthy investors tainted the recognition process.
- Clear across the nation, a tiny independent band of Indians was allegedly overthrown by BIA insiders plotting their way to casino wealth, according to the Associated Press. Four congressmen have called for an investigation into that scandal. Before the BIA

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became involved, the Ione Band had about 70 members living near Sacramento. But, the AP reports, BIA officials opened the band's membership against the group's traditional leaders' wishes and brought in more than 450 new members, none of whom are related to the original members. Those are said to include the BIA officials who supervised the membership expansion and new elections, plus dozens of their relatives. They ultimately replaced the band's original leadership, .

- The nation's heartland is not exempt. The Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma have filed a claim with the U.S. Department of the Interior to 27 million acres in northeastern Colorado, claiming title to it as part of their traditional homeland, but said they were willing to exchange that claim for 500 acres near Denver upon which to build a casino. Only months before, the tribes said they had not considered such a move. Now they have apparently been persuaded by the financial backing of a venture capitalist.

It's easy to see the intent of Congress to provide cultural autonomy and economic development for Native Americans has become a twisted parody. It has become a tale of big gambling money polluting and perverting both the process and some of our most vulnerable citizens.

**I**ndian gambling may also become one of our nation's most deceitful and damaging promises to Native Americans.

The entire process, as it has evolved, grants "sovereign Indian nations" limited monopolies in their reservation areas. They are prey to schemes, frauds and organized criminal activity with virtually no expertise or structure to protect themselves. The entire Indian gambling regulatory agency has fewer investigators and regulators than are employed to watch the dozen casinos in Atlantic City.

There are now more than 300 Indian casinos operating in America, and more than 200 groups seeking recognition as tribes. To make matters worse, several tribes are attempting to secure land far from their reservations, and even several states away, so they can build casinos.

Non-Indian gambling investors use tribes as a wedge to drive gambling into unwilling states. Some of these investors are not even U.S. Citizens! The two massive Connecticut casinos proved obscenely profitable for the South African and Malaysian financiers who funded them.

Mixed with the hidden costs of addiction, bankruptcy and crime, some tribes have found economic benefits in their casinos. But there is no reason to believe the industry will remain helpful to Indian needs once the doors to gambling are open. Already, card rooms and racetracks in California have fielded a referendum to try to pry into that state's estimated \$5 billion Indian Casino market. If that measure passes, then every tribe in the state must give up lucrative shares of their gambling revenues. If not, tracks and card rooms will be allowed to become casinos. That will destroy the Indian compacts and monopolies.

# ‘The Great White Father didn’t do his job – again.’

-- Susan Abrams, Seneca sovereignty preservation and anti-gambling activist

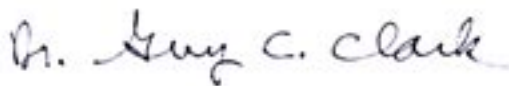
States have traded tribes the right to build casinos for a share of the take, even though IGRA forbids taxation of the tribes. And, so far, no one has challenged the constitutionality of allowing one group of citizens within a state to do what others can't. When tribal gambling has opened all the states it can, the industry will have no reason to support tribes. It is not likely that Native Americans will find gambling industry bosses more charitable than the U.S. Government has been over the centuries. As Seneca activist Susan Abrams said at our last conference, we will most likely find, “The Great White Father didn’t do his job – again.”

This has been an outrageous battle from the beginning, but we’re seeing progress. There are investigations going on. There will be hearings, and the legislation will be changed.

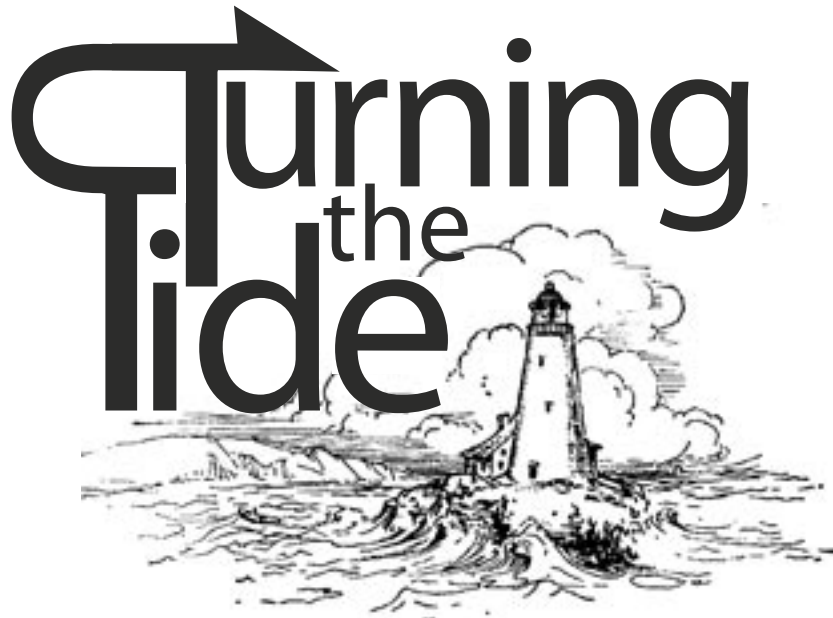
We’ll need to be on the field in force in order to make the best of a seemingly impossible situation. Gambling promoters are pouring literally millions of dollars into legislative campaigns and political party coffers in this election cycle. We have to swell the grassroots movement to expose the corrupting influence of gambling’s big money and muscle. The security and well being of Americans everywhere, all of us, including every member of every tribe, are at stake.

Again, we know that we can count on your support to turn the tide on this outrageous and unjust wave of gambling and government abuse. The potential for burgeoning addiction, bankruptcy and crime is too great to ignore, and the critical moment is upon us. This is the first real chance we’ve had to make changes since IGRA was passed in 1988.

Please join us in this fight. Be as generous as you can. We promise we’ll use your funds wisely, and with the deepest respect for our Native American members and neighbors. The issue isn’t Indian gambling; it’s the gambling industry using the Indian nations to exploit everyone.



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