

# Chronological: 20th Anniversary of Enactment of Indian Gaming Regulatory Act

Senator Daniel K. Inouye Papers  
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October 7, 2008

Speech - 2008  
20th Anniversary,  
Enactment of Indian Gaming  
Reg. Act

STATEMENT  
OF  
MR DANIEL K. INOUE  
ON THE  
TENTH ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE  
ENACTMENT OF THE  
INDIAN GAMING REGULATORY ACT

OK

We all know that date - it is engraved in most of our minds because it such a critical date for the tribes that have since become Federally-recognized, or those tribes that have been restored to Federal recognition, or tribes that have reached a settlement of their claims - October 17, 1988.

So here we are - 20 years later - at a crossroads some would say - that affords us the opportunity to look back on the path that has led us to this day - as well as to look forward in anticipation of what lies ahead.

In the early days, as I suppose is typical with any new statute, there were growing pains - a new agency had to be formed, regulations promulgated, and a number of states found the need to litigate the meaning of the terms of the Act.

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provided those who came to them with further clarification of Congress' intent, but in the process, the courts also identified areas in which the Congress must act if the spirit and intent of the law is to be fully realized.

The progress has been remarkable by any measure. The advent of technologies that we could never have imagined 20 years ago has proven to be a source of enormous prosperity for some, and for others, an exercise in frustration as 20-year-old statutory language locks them into the technologies of the eighties.

Twenty years ago, my colleagues in the Congress were envisioning a growth in tribal bingo - I don't think any of us could have predicted that this little law would serve as the foundation for a multi-billion dollar industry that continues to grow.

That growth has enabled tribal governments to achieve what had never been accomplished in all the years of Federal programs - the building of hospitals and clinics and schools and housing and roads and programs for the preservation of tribal cultures and traditions - as well as places where the elderly can receive the support they deserve in their

own home communities.

Tribes began to have sufficient resources to enable them to reach out and help other tribes - whether that assistance took the form of a start-up in gaming or in some other economic development initiative.

Those successful partnerships have given rise to productive new relationships in other arenas - tribal leaders have become sophisticated entrepreneurs.

The era in which most Americans had never even visited an Indian reservation is for the most part long gone.

With this new popularity has come attendant challenges for tribes in sustaining the values of their ancestors - while confronting the realities with which most modern-day enterprises must contend.

The younger generations of some tribes no longer know the poverty in which their parents and grandparents were raised - but nor do they know their tribal culture and traditions and language.

That is why I believe that it is so important that we take an important step in the direction of educating not only the young people of Native communities but also all of the younger generations of this

country - who sadly, may know very little about the fact that our American form of government has its roots in the democracy of the Iroquois confederacy, for instance.

Nor do most Americans know that on a per capita basis, more Native people have enlisted in the armed services of the United States and voluntarily placed themselves in harm's way in defense of our nation, than any other segment of our society.

So these are just some of the reasons I was pleased to introduce a resolution in the Senate designating each Friday following Thanksgiving as Native American Heritage Day.

There are many things that most Americans still need to learn about Indian country, and perhaps the designation of this day will begin a process of developing curricula for the public schools, so that America's students will come to know a lot more about the rich cultural legacy that your ancestors contributed to the fabric of our contemporary society.

We have a museum - the National Museum of the American Indians - and I still haven't given up hope that one day we will have a

university too - a Native American University.

In the more immediate future, I hope that we will have a Native plank or platform formulated by Indian country and embraced by those who seek to serve in public office.

Americans should understand that over the past two hundred years, Indian tribes relinquished more than 50 million acres of land - often involuntarily - and that today, tribes that have the resources to do so, only want to reacquire the lands that they lost through allotment or homestead acts or taxation or termination.

The United States government should understand that part of its role as trustee is to support tribal governments in their efforts to address some of the more damaging policies of the past, not stand in their way as though the Federal government is some mighty door-keeper to the futures of Native people.

Yes, twenty years later, we can say with confidence that there have been great advancements on many horizons - many of them made possible because of the enactment of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Today there are opportunities that never existed before - in which

governments in Indian country have the resources to help one another, particularly those that, for one reason or another, have not had the same opportunities to thrive and flourish.

As a friend of Indian country for lo these many years, I am proud of what you have accomplished and the skills you have acquired that will enable your governments to diversify tribal economies - for gaming is not the panacea for every tribal economy - but the friendships and partnerships you form with other tribes will be the legacy you shape for those who come after you.

The brave warriors of old have their counterparts in the young men and women who will carry on the responsibilities of leadership in Indian country - we will do well to focus on their futures as we celebrate the great progress that has been forged by today's tribal governments.

Sovereignty - it is your responsibility as well as your right - we must never forget that most fundamental of all principles - if Native America is to continue on this remarkable path of success.

And so I join others in extending our congratulations upon the award of Wendell Chino Humanitarian Award of 2008 to the Chairman



of the Soboba Tribe, Chairman Bobby Salgado, who is recognized as a standard bearer of sovereignty.

Aloha.