

STATEMENT OF WAYNE TAYLOR, JR., CHAIRMAN OF THE HOPI TRIBE TO THE
NATIONAL GAMBLING IMPACT STUDY COMMISSION

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My name is Wayne Taylor, Jr., Chairman of the Hopi Tribe and on behalf of the Hopi people I want to express our appreciation to the study commission for this opportunity to present my views on the impacts of Indian gaming on Indian people. The Hopi view is of course the view of a non-gaming Tribe. As many of you know, in 1995, the Hopi Tribe by a referendum vote, rejected gaming as a means of revenue generation or economic development. The vote of the Hopi people was overwhelmingly against the concept of gaming on Hopi lands. At the heart of this decision was a concern expressed by many of our people about the potential adverse effects of making gaming easily available to our people. The potential risk to the cultural integrity of Hopi society seemed to outweigh the potential benefits to engaging in a tribal gaming enterprise. While the Hopi people have clearly spoken on this point, let me state clearly for you today, that the Hopi tribe respects and supports the sovereign right of other tribes to choose differently. We realize that the decision to engage in gaming activities begins as a personal choice for individual members of the various tribes and ultimately is a political choice for the leadership of the tribes based at least in part on the unique circumstances of each tribe. We will continue to support the right of other tribes to make this choice.

When we think about the impacts of tribal gaming, we should start by remembering the underlying purposes of Indian gaming enterprises. At the heart of any tribe's decision to engage in gaming activities seems to be a sincere desire to advance tribal sovereignty and achieve true self-determination. We all realize that without adequate financial resources, the promise of Tribal self-determination is never realized and remains only a dream. Choosing ones future must always be supported by the means to make that future a reality. Since the birth of Indian gaming in 1979, a number of tribes have been able to use their gaming revenues to provide increased levels of essential governmental services to their people, services which might not have been possible without these revenues. In the face of an almost non-existent tax base on most reservations and a shrinking federal dollar, some tribes have found that gaming revenues have been the difference between an inadequate program and quality governmental services. Certainly one can not argue that the provision of increasing levels of health care, housing, and educational assistance on these reservations is anything but a positive result of the gaming industry. However, the analysis should not stop here. When we think about the impacts of tribal gaming, in addition to the positive impacts on tribal economies, we must also look at at least three other areas of impact, including (1) the impacts on the individual Tribal member gaming participant coming to tribal casinos to spend individual dollars; (2) the impact of the gaming activity on the gaming tribe itself, in other words, the tribal government sponsoring the gaming activity and individual tribal members; and finally (3) the impact of Indian gaming on non-gaming tribes.

Perhaps the most important question that Indian leaders can ask themselves about the impacts of Indian gaming is the question of - what is the overall effect on the lives of Indian people of Indian gaming? This requires an examination of whether on balance Indian gaming has improved the quality of life on our tribal homelands and whether it has furthered Tribal Sovereignty and Self-determination.

This debate about the impact of tribal gaming is different than the usual debate on gaming. This is not about federal regulation or state compacts, this debate examines the effects of the interaction between gaming enterprises and individual Tribal members. In stating the Hopi view about the impacts of gaming on the lives of individual tribal members, let me point out that we have not conducted any polls or commissioned any scientific studies aimed at this particular aspect of human behavior. Our views are stated simply from what we have observed. One need only visit any Indian casino to realize that a significant number of casino patrons are Indian people from the reservation on which the casino is located or from other nearby reservations, including non-gaming reservations. From this observation it is easy to conclude that Indian people are spending a part-albeit an as yet undefined part-of their financial resources in gaming activities. I believe it is also safe to conclude that most Indian people do not routinely have surplus disposable income which should be expended on games of chance. Most of our people on most reservations and tribal communities find it difficult enough to accumulate enough income on a monthly basis to meet the most basic needs of their families. While the decision to expend those funds in gaming activities is an individual choice, the impacts on family members who frequently do not participate in that choice are nevertheless affected. The effects of tribal gaming operations on individual tribal members and their families deserves a thorough examination before any final conclusions can be drawn. A substantial measure of the responsibility for studies aimed at reaching these conclusions should be shouldered by the gaming Tribes.

The effects of gaming activities on the entire tribal culture and society must also be considered. The impacts on individual tribal members will always translate into impacts on the overall tribal culture. Indeed, it is not difficult to envision tribal gaming not only influencing but also becoming a significant part of tribal culture, perhaps even pushing aside in importance other characteristics of tribal culture that have long sustained us and which should be cultivated and nourished. None of us would want to run the risk that gaming and its revenues somehow become a major identifying factor when people think about Indian culture. No tribal government should ever put itself in a position such that it becomes so dependent on gaming revenues that it loses sight of the need to focus on matters such as building and nurturing the spirit of our people, encouraging our children to exercise their minds across a wide field of endeavors and perhaps most importantly, to encourage our people to cultivate the spiritual strengths that have sustained all of our tribes throughout history. Tribal governments must be cautious when they embrace gaming, cautious not to lose sight of these higher values and purposes which each of us as tribal leaders should be working toward. The positive impacts of tribal gaming, and there are many, must not blind us to the accompanying negative impacts. Our elders have taught us that there is a balance in life, that with every good thing that comes into our life there are also some things that are not so good. Our responsibility to our children is to maximize those good things and minimize those that are not so good. Indian gaming must be subject to this same sort of balancing.

Finally, let me turn to the matter of the impacts of gaming on the non-gaming tribe. Unfortunately, there has always been a tendency in this country on the part of the non-Indian to lump all Indian people into one category. Most non-Indians tend to generalize about Indian America and to feel that what is true of one tribal society is also true of another. Public perception or more

properly stated, incorrect public perception, is the enemy of all tribes, gaming and non-gaming. Perhaps even more unfortunate is the fact that public perception almost always translates into Congressional perception. One of the most dangerous oxymorons currently floating around in non-Indian America and in particular in Congress is the idea of the so-called "rich Indian tribe". Somehow, I have never associated the word "rich" with the words "Indian tribe". Many members of the public and Congress seem very comfortable with this phrase. Unfortunately, for us this is a classic example of public perception failing to match up with reality. With the exception of a very few, very small, and very fortunate tribes who have had extraordinary success with tribal gaming, the majority of tribes across the country still find it very difficult to reconcile the obligation and responsibility side of their ledgers with the income side. Most of us continue to struggle merely to provide the most basic governmental services to our people, protect our lands and the environment, and provide meaningful opportunities for growth and advancement for our people. This false perception by the public and Congress has begun to translate itself into phrases such as "means testing", with an emphasis on mean-spirited. Congress has in recent years begun to find new justifications for its' historic lack of enthusiasm for funding its trust responsibilities to the Indian people of this country. It has become easy for members of Congress to generalize this attitude by expressing the belief that tribes across the country are rich as a result of Tribal gaming, are fully capable of taking care of the full range of funding needs, and should therefore not look to the federal government for assistance. This is perhaps the most stinging impact of Indian tribal gaming on non-gaming tribes. While tribal gaming successes have provided no direct tangible benefits to non-gaming tribes, the non-gaming tribes nevertheless share the brunt of the Congressional backlash and unfavorable public perception. All of the negative characterizations typically associated with gaming activities, such as compulsive/addictive behavior, the search for the elusive something for nothing, the desire to get rich quick, and the reaping of financial benefits at the expense of human behavior--these characterizations tend to spill over to affect all Indian tribes whether gaming or not. Gaming Tribes should seriously consider initiatives aimed at eliminating this unfortunate and unfair spill over effect.

Potentially the most dangerous impact of the incorrect public perception of gaming on all Tribes is a noticeable shift in the way the tribes are being viewed not only in Congress but by the public in general. In the past, Congress and the courts, and I believe the public, have viewed tribes as governments exercising governmental responsibilities and dedicated to the best interests of their people. There now seems to be a shifting of that view toward one in which tribal governments are now viewed primarily as casino owners and only secondarily as tribal governments. Ironically, what began as an attempt to strengthen tribal sovereignty and self-determination may now be undermining those very principles which are at the heart of tribal government. I believe that this debate on the impacts of tribal gaming must ultimately lead each of us as tribal leaders into a larger more important debate concerning the future of tribal government in America. And, so once again we return to the central question we are faced with today. The question of whether or not on balance Indian gaming has improved the quality of life on our tribal homelands and has truly advanced our sovereignty and our capacity to exercise genuine self-determination. May we commit ourselves to answering this question and findings satisfactory responses to the answers we arrive at.

Thank you.