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CHAIRPERSON JAMES

Ms. Beverly Wright.

MS. WRIGHT: Thank you, Madam Chair. And I will say to you that I probably cannot make my ten minutes. I'm a Wampanoag woman and it's very hard in my culture to summarize. But I will try.

1 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Unfortunately, I'm
2 going to have to ask you to keep to the time
3 constraints to be fair to the rest of the panelists.
4 Thank you.

5 MS. WRIGHT: Good afternoon, Madam
6 Chairwoman and Commission members.

7 My name is Beverly Wright and I am
8 Chairperson of the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head
9 Aquinnah. I am also a member of the Board and past
10 vice chair of United South and Eastern Tribes which
11 represents tribes from Maine to Florida and west to
12 Texas.

13 I welcome you to our aboriginal territory
14 on behalf of my Tribal Council of the United South and
15 Eastern Tribes and the members and elected leadership
16 of the Sovereign Indian Nations of the Northeast.

17 I have been given the awesome
18 responsibility of setting before this Commission just a
19 few of the many positive social and economic impacts
20 that Indian gaming has and will continue to have on the

1 peoples of the Northeast. I will also attempt to
2 address jus a few of the many myths and untruths that
3 have plagued Indian gaming operations since their
4 inception in the early 1960s.

5 As an aside to my remarks, I would like to
6 tell you something about my people. The Wampanoags
7 were among the first Native Americans to greet European
8 newcomers to this country. It was we who helped the
9 Pilgrims survive the cruel winters of the 1620s,
10 introduced them to what we call the three sisters,
11 corn, squash and beans. And indeed it was we who
12 feasted with them at their first Thanksgiving.

13 The upcoming television presentation of
14 Herman Melville's Moby Dick serves as a reminder of the
15 intimate association between the whaling industry and
16 the Wampanoags. It was said that no whaling ship would
17 ever leave the port of New Bedford without a Wampanoag
18 in the crew, it would have been bad luck, otherwise.
19 Luck or not, the tribesmen were prized as skillful, and
20 therefore profitable, harpooners.

1 As you visit tribal gaming facilities
2 across this country and review the many documents you
3 will be receiving from Indian country, I would ask that
4 you keep in mind, that you keep two things in mind.
5 First, you are viewing gaming enterprises operated by
6 sovereign units of government for governmental
7 purposes, not for the benefit of individuals or
8 corporations.

9 Second, you are seeing the sovereign tribal
10 governments exercising the same inherent sovereign
11 right to raise revenue to support their programs and
12 services as are exercised by state governments
13 throughout the United States. This inherent right to
14 use gaming as a method to raise revenues for our
15 programs and services was reaffirmed by the United
16 States Supreme Court and again by the Congress through
17 passage of Public Law 100-495, 497 excuse me, the
18 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

19 When you visit our neighbors, the
20 Mashantucket Pequot Tribe of Connecticut, and view the

1 materials you will receive concerning the Mohegan and
2 Oneida Tribal gaming operations, you will undoubtedly
3 be awestruck by their fabulous and their successful
4 programs. I only wish I had a time machine that would
5 allow you to see these communities less than twelve
6 years ago so you could see the difference IGRA made in
7 their lives.

8 Because the tribes of New England were the
9 first Indian nations to meet our white brothers and
10 sisters, these early encounters resulted in treaties
11 that predated the creation of the United States. That
12 lead to our being among the last tribes in this country
13 to be legally acknowledged by the United States
14 government. This lack of acknowledgement lead to the
15 near annihilation of the Northeast tribes.

16 Thus each and every tribe in New England
17 struggled to survive for generations with or little or
18 no support from the state or federal government despite
19 the loss of land and resources. As a result, it was
20 less than twelve years ago that leaders like the

1 Pequot's distinguished chairman, Skip Hayward, were
2 spending all their days and half of their nights
3 struggling to obtain medical help for tribal members,
4 funds to educate tribal children and meet the food,
5 clothing and housing needs of their people.

6 All of the non-gaming tribes I speak for
7 today are relying upon the meager federal budgets
8 provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian
9 Health Service and a few other federal and state
10 agencies in order to survive and assist their members.

11 Those budgets are, by those federal
12 agencies' own admission, less than 50 percent of the
13 amount required to address only the most basic needs of
14 our people. The Mohegan Tribe was not even getting
15 these meager amounts because it lacked federal
16 recognition. The same situation existed for the
17 Pequots and the Oneidas before they opened their Class
18 III gaming facilities.

19 As the chairwoman of a tribe that is not
20 yet engaged in gaming, I can attest to the day to day

1 struggles that each of us faces in trying to help our
2 people survive and better themselves. I spend at least
3 six days a week trying to find ways of coming up with
4 the money a tribe requires to meet such basic needs as
5 medical assistance, housing and heat for our tribal
6 members, not to mention telephone bills and paychecks
7 for our tribal staff.

8 None of these non-gaming tribes has a tax
9 base nor the funds to seek out and develop business
10 ventures to supplement our meager federal budgets. The
11 federal and state programs we receive, while greatly
12 appreciated, come with so many strings attached that we
13 spend more time trying to stay in compliance than we do
14 in helping the people they are designed to serve.

15 So when you view the beautiful clinics,
16 schools, police and fire stations, day care facilities,
17 nursing homes and housing developments on those
18 reservations having tribal gaming facilities, please be
19 sure to look at when they were constructed and when
20 many of the programs they house were initiated. With

1 rare exception, they were all constructed and developed
2 after gaming. And they didn't cost the taxpayers a
3 penny. These wonderful services serve as shining
4 examples of what can be done when you eliminate federal
5 and state budget problems and regulations and empower
6 tribal communities to help themselves.

7 If you ask the Pequots and the Oneidas to
8 list the tribal buildings and facilities that existed
9 on their reservations before gaming you will find that
10 they can probably count those facilities on the fingers
11 of hand.

12 Then take a look at the federal needs
13 assessment study prepared on each of these tribes the
14 year before gaming commenced. And compare those
15 statistics with those in existence today. These actual
16 comparisons will tell you more than I could possibly
17 tell you in this short testimony. We are very
18 passionate about our right to conduct gaming and for
19 that reason.

1 So, when you hear the unfounded criticisms
2 of Indian gaming, please remember that these gaming
3 businesses were opened to address the needs of
4 governments that had no tax base, no investment
5 capital, or infrastructure, but did have high
6 unemployment, severe poverty and very little federal
7 and state assistance.

8 It is these same types of problems that
9 have lead my tribe, the Wampanoags, along with the
10 Narragansetts of Rhode Island, the Malaseets,
11 Pasamaquoddy and Penobscot Tribes of Maine and the
12 Mohawks and Oneidas of New York to seek the necessary
13 federal and state approvals for Class II and Class III
14 gaming facilities.

15 It is ironic that you convene here in
16 Boston where the First Circuit Court of Appeals upheld
17 the rights of our brothers the Narragansetts to engage
18 in gaming, only to have Senator Chaffee get a bill
19 passed prohibiting them from having even a bingo game.
20 And he did this without so much as a hearing.

1 Each of the tribes I've referred to has
2 since been denied those rights through the actions of
3 state governments. We, like all the New England
4 tribes, as well as tribes throughout the country, who
5 are concerned with any diminishment in the rights
6 possessed by federally recognized Indian tribes,
7 support the efforts of the Maine and Narragansett
8 tribes to restore their gaming rights under federal
9 law.

10 As you visit tribal facilities throughout
11 the United States and view the real problems Indian
12 people continue to encounter, I hope that you too will
13 begin to understand why these injustices need to be
14 addressed.

15 As the leader of a tribe seeking to
16 establish tribal gaming, I hear all kinds of people
17 telling the Wampanoag people that we should find
18 another way to solve our problems. But as a Wampanoag
19 woman and a tribal leader, I have yet to have any of
20 these critics suggest a viable alternative.

1 None has shown me how to pay for the
2 medical services required by our children. None has
3 shown me how to deal with the Indian Health Service
4 Policy of prioritizing health delivery that can result
5 in a seven to ten year waiting list for some
6 operations. Well before the time is up, the patient's
7 condition is likely to worsen enough to cut time on the
8 waiting time, that is some solution.

9 These are problems our critics fail to talk
10 about, but they are the problems that I and every
11 tribal leader in this country are faced with every day
12 we are in office. I understood why the Commonwealth
13 opened its lottery, I also wish that our critics would
14 understand why we are seeking a similar solution to our
15 even greater problems, and why we respond as we do when
16 these Marie Antoinettes high handedly say, let them eat
17 cake.

18 I would also like to ask you to seek out
19 information on the economic impact that these Indian
20 facilities have had on the states and the people and

1 the businesses in their surrounding areas. Examine the
2 number of new non-tribal businesses that have been
3 opened in each and every area around a tribal casino
4 and the drop in the unemployment rate. Ask the local
5 banks about the impact that these tribal dollars have
6 had on their ability to make personal loans to local
7 residents and finance business development. Ask the
8 universities about the increase in the enrollment of
9 Indian students and ask those long term merchants about
10 their increased sales. Also, please take a thorough,
11 honest and objective look at those rumors you will hear
12 about increased crime.

13 Compare the crime statistics with those of
14 other areas that have had major public entertainment
15 facilities opened in their midst. Before blaming
16 Indian gaming for any increase in the number of
17 encounters between the police and members of the
18 public, take a look at the same police statistics for
19 such areas such as Kissimmee, Florida before and after
20 the development of Disney World and Epcot Center.

1 If you do, you will see that mere increases
2 in the number of people visiting a given area for any
3 reason will lead to increases in certain types of
4 police encounters, traffic violation, bad checks and
5 the like. So don't blame Indian gaming for creating
6 the same types of minor problems that would be created
7 if Walt Disney or Sea World moved into town.

8 I would like now to just take a few minutes
9 to address some of the specific myths--

10 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Ms. Wright, you have
11 about two minutes remaining.

12 MS. WRIGHT: Oh, okay. It's very hard for
13 me to summarize, I am representing 23 tribes. Let's
14 see.

15 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Please be assured that
16 all of your, that the commissioners have in front of
17 them the complete testimony.

18 MS. WRIGHT: All right. I'd just like to
19 talk about the Wampanoags.

20 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Certainly.

1 MS. WRIGHT: In the case of the Wampanoags
2 we project that 99 percent of those hired to work at
3 our proposed Fall River facility will be non-Indian.
4 If we were to be allowed a Class II facility we could
5 create 500 full time jobs with a like number of spin
6 off jobs. With a Class II facility our agreement with
7 the City of Fall River calls for the tribe to
8 contribute \$1 million for roadway infrastructure, \$1.5
9 million for a new fire station. And with a Class II
10 facility we would contribute \$2.5 million for a new
11 school under the agreement.

12 While there is much more I'd like to say,
13 let me leave you with one last thought. In order to
14 fully understand the impact that Indian gaming has had,
15 and will continue to have on tribal communities, you
16 need to understand the problems and human struggles
17 that exist or did exist before Indian gaming.

18 In our case, we have difficulty living a
19 decent life in our ancestral homeland of Gay Head where
20 land now sells for \$100,000 an acre, and many of us can

1 not afford to rent a house. Of the 860 tribal members
2 only 350 live on Martha's Vineyard.

3 Our gaming facility under IGRA is essential
4 to our continued existence. We have had a long hard
5 road, but we are determined to pursue our rights.

6 We are currently working toward an approval
7 of a Class II, high stakes Bingo facility in the City
8 of Fall River. And the people of Fall River voted to
9 legalize gaming by a majority of 22 percent.

10 I would just like to make one other
11 statement. I have heard comments from Senator Prague
12 as to the employee's rights practices followed by the
13 Mashantucket Pequot Tribe. The previous speaker's
14 observations about the low number of terminated
15 employees winning their jobs back ignores what I
16 understand is a pretrial process that indeed has
17 resulted in many terminated employees getting their
18 jobs back.

19 I would hope that if this Commission finds
20 this to be a relevant issue, they study it first hand

1 and not rely on the comments of those who might for
2 political reasons be promoting a particular point of
3 view.

4 And I thank you very much for allowing me
5 to speak before you today.

6 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER LEONE: I'd just like to say
8 that giving the limited time, and since we have the
9 testimony and since the testimony raises some
10 questions, and I have this feeling we're not going to
11 be able to ask the questions before we leave for
12 Foxwoods. I just hope that anybody who can summarize
13 and enable us to use some of your time to ask you
14 questions please do it. You know, we do read the
15 testimony.

16 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: We do indeed. And we
17 do have it in front of us, and so it really isn't
18 necessary to read every word. I think the subject is
19 so important but I do want to have the time for the
20 interaction with the Commissioners. I did mention that

1 we would be juggling people around to try to
2 accommodate schedules and try to accommodate travel
3 schedules.