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21 CHAIRPERSON JAMES:

22 I think we're missing a few speakers, I'm

23 just going to go through the list and see who we have.

1 Joy Yeager? Jerry D'Avolio? William
2 O'Brien? Matt Thomas?

3 MR. THOMAS: Good afternoon. I am Chief
4 Sachem Matthew Thomas of the Narragansett Indian Tribe.
5 We are the indigenous Native American people of the
6 State of Rhode Island, and a tribe of about 2,500
7 members. We've been a federally recognized tribe since
8 about 1983 and our reservation lands are in
9 Charlestown.

10 My goal this afternoon is to report to you
11 on the impact of poverty, joblessness and the social
12 ills suffered by members of my tribe. We currently
13 administer 15 Bureau of Indian Affairs funded social
14 service and training programs and health planning under
15 the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance
16 Act. All of these programs are under funded. The
17 Narragansetts have no economic means to supplement the
18 federal dollars we receive.

19 The economic situation for the Narragansett
20 is not good. While the average per capita income for a
21 Rhode Islander was \$15,000, according to a 1990 census,
22 for a Narragansett it was only 60 percent of that
23 figure, or \$9,000. This is an undue burden for my
24 people to endure during this day and age.

1 It is important that since 1996, the
2 Narragansetts have been deprived of a right which
3 Congress afforded recognized tribes under the 1988
4 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, the right to establish
5 and operate gaming facilities on tribal lands. When we
6 announced our plans to build and open a gaming facility
7 on our reservation in 1992, under IGRA, the state sued
8 us. We won. So what did the state representatives do,
9 they changed the law. This discrimination is
10 particularly unjust when viewed against the success of
11 the Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun casinos in Connecticut.

12 I understand that many of you visited
13 Foxwoods last evening as part of your view of Native
14 American gaming establishments. In 1997, about \$943
15 million was wagered at the two Connecticut casinos on
16 slot machines alone. The Mashantucket Pequot and
17 Mohegan tribes are prospering from their endeavors, as
18 is the state of Connecticut, which received \$242
19 million last year from these two casinos as part of a
20 revenue sharing agreement. It is estimated that one of
21 every three dollars wagered at Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun
22 was wagered by a Rhode Islander, neither the
23 Narragansett Tribe or the state of Rhode Island benefit
24 from that.

1 As I mentioned earlier, a legislative rider
2 proposed by Senator John Chaffee was enacted as part of
3 an omnibus appropriations bill in 1996. That rider
4 eliminates our reservation for the purposes of IGRA.
5 It appears that the priority of Rhode Island's governor
6 is the protection of the two casinos at Newport and
7 Lincoln, despite the repeated polls conducted by our
8 tribe showing that Rhode Islanders strongly support a
9 Narragansett operated gaming facility.

10 The governor has stated on numerous
11 occasions that we should subject ourselves to Rhode
12 Island law and take the issue of a Narragansett gaming
13 facility before the voters. When we recently announced
14 our intention to do just that, Governor Almond went on
15 record saying he would do all he could do to see that
16 we are defeated. We seek fairness, we get
17 discriminated against.

18 And finally, when this Commission reports
19 to Congress, please draw a clear distinction between
20 Las Vegas gambling and Indian gaming. Tribes, much
21 like states, are sovereign governments obligated to
22 provide for the health and well-being of our citizens.
23 And like states, we tribes must find ways to pay for
24 the services and programs we provide.

1 The United States has a Constitutional
2 sacred trust responsibility to preserve tribal
3 governments and Indian people. Nationally, Indian
4 gaming has given tribes the resources needed to better
5 ensure the success of their members. The Narragansetts
6 ask for no less for our children and our future
7 generations.

8 Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Thank you.