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University of Maine News

National Tribal Gaming Official to Speak at UMaine

Nov. 26, 2002

Media contact: Susan Young at (207) 581-3756

ORONO – A proposal by two Maine Indian tribes to build a \$650 million casino in the southern part of the state has generated a lot of controversy. Casino advocates say gaming monies will enable the tribes to become self-sufficient while also boosting state revenues. Opponents, on the other hand, say such a facility would lead to increased crime in the area, take employees away from area businesses and cost the state millions to treat people with gambling addiction problems. Governor Angus King even went so far as to say casinos would take money from the pockets of local people and create a “Sodom-by-the-sea.”

Lost in the rush of State House lobbying and local referendums on the issue has been the tribal perspective on gaming and its potential. Across the country, Indian tribes with casinos tend to be much better off economically than their counterparts without gaming operations, according to national studies.

To this end, the University of Maine will present a lecture entitled “The Native American Success Story: Indian Gaming is Rebuilding Indian Communities” on Dec. 11. The talk will be given by Ernest L. Stevens, Jr., chairman of the National Indian Gaming Association. His lecture, sponsored by the Hudson Museum and the Native American Studies Program, will begin at 7 p.m. in 101 Neville Hall. It is free and open to the public.

Stevens, a member of the Oneida Nation of Wisconsin, will talk about the history of Indian gaming, the range of Indian gaming enterprises, and the role of gaming in economic development, providing context for understanding this issue in Maine. NIGA, established in 1985, is a non-profit organization of 168 Indian nations representing organizations, tribes and businesses engaged in tribal gaming enterprises around the country. The Washington, D.C.-based organization serves as the primary regulator of Indian gaming at the federal level, providing background level of oversight, and reviewing the licensing of gaming management and key employees, management of contracts, and tribal gaming ordinances.

While citizens and lawmakers will soon be asked to allow a casino to be built in Maine, other nearby states are racing to build gaming facilities of their own, hoping that they will close big budget gaps.

Sponsors project that a casino in Maine would produce \$50 million a year in income for the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy tribes, generate \$75 million in state gaming taxes and \$20 million in other revenues for state and local government.

The model of Indian gaming most frequently pointed to is that of the Mashantucket and Mohegan’s gaming operations in Connecticut, which include Foxwoods and Mohegan Sun. These gaming operations, which are among the largest in the world, are anomalies within the

Indian gaming world. Most are much smaller operations, yet they still confer considerable benefits upon the tribes that run them.

“Our investigation inescapably yields the conclusion that the positive social and economic impacts of gaming, both on and off reservations, far outweigh the negative,” concluded a 1998 report to the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. “Indeed, for much of Indian country, the alternative to gaming is the status quo ante: poverty, powerlessness and despair.”

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