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California Tribal Governments to Study Economic Impact on State's Economy

(March 23, 2011, Sacramento, CA) – California's American Indian Tribes have a positive story to tell. To identify how much tribes contribute to the state's economy, a coalition of tribal organizations have hired a prominent California research firm—Beacon Economics—to analyze the overall economic impact.

The economic impact study will examine a wide variety of areas including jobs generated in tribally owned casinos and other businesses, tribal government programs, expenditures going to purchase goods and services from local businesses and vendors, as well as public safety services, environmental, transportation and charitable donations that benefit neighboring non-Indian communities. Tribes engaged in larger gaming operations also share profits with 71 other tribes with no gaming or minimal operations.

"This study is an important undertaking by tribal governments," said Daniel J. Tucker, chairman of the California Nations Indian Gaming Association (CNIGA). "It's significant that CNIGA, the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN), and the California Association of Tribal Governments (CATG) are participating, as it will provide a more complete picture of how tribal economic development and self-sufficiency are benefiting California taxpayers."

"Tribes are proud of what we have accomplished over the past twenty years as a result of gaming," said Lynn Valbuena, chairwoman of the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN). "When voters affirmed our right to offer gaming, they gave us the opportunity to pull our communities out of abject poverty. We committed to making a difference for all California tribes and contributing to California's economy in a meaningful way."

"Today, many of the statewide and local benefits resulting from gaming are not recognized, because they have not been recently studied. It's time for a report card to let Californians know there has been a return on their support," Tucker explained.

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Regarding the choice of an economic consultant, Tucker noted, "There is no better, more qualified or credible firm than Beacon Economics. In these times, when most people do not trust what they hear or read, we want a study that is accurate, factual, quantifiable, and credible. We believe we have commissioned the right people to do the job."

Beacon Economics' Founding Partner Christopher Thornberg agrees that it is high time for a serious analysis of tribal gaming's economic impacts on the state. "California's tribal casinos have been a major part of our landscape for over a decade and it's important to apply sound research methods to identify the true economic impacts these growing enterprises have on the state," he said.

Tucker added, "We know tribes are responsible for generating billions of direct and indirect dollars to our state's economy through jobs, benefits, taxes, and by supplementing local government services such as education, police and fire, transportation, and other off reservation benefits such as infrastructure and environmental improvements

Valbuena continued, "Even with the economic downturn that has affected the gaming industry, just as it has the rest of the state, tribes are continuing to make substantial economic contributions in their local communities."

Taxpayer relief, according to Valbuena, is an additional factor that has accompanied the development of tribal enterprises. "It's not always recognized that as more tribes become increasingly financially able to provide for our own people and employ large numbers of non-Indians, the taxpayers' burden of unemployment, health care and welfare costs are reduced," she said.

Valbuena noted that the economic information gathered from the tribes would be voluntary. "We are urging every federally recognized California tribal governments to participate. While neighbors of Indian communities may be aware of the benefits they receive from tribes, statewide the total impact is unknown.

"Even tribes without gaming are contributing to the state's economy," said Mark Romero, Chairman of the California Association of Tribal Governments (CATG) "They are more self-reliant and circulating money, thanks, in part, to revenue, they receive from the gaming tribes, and their own employment and community improvements.

"Even the many impoverished tribes with no reservation businesses contribute to their community when they spend their share of Indian Gaming Revenue Sharing Fund in their local community for essential goods and services," he explained. Purchases include health and dental care premiums, fuel, clothing, food, building materials and vehicles.

CATG Board Treasurer Arch Super, Chairman of the Karuk Tribe of California, is eager for objective proof that tribal economic development benefits communities surrounding Indian

reservations. "Most California tribes occupy remote reservation lands that have poor roads and utilities. Business and jobs are not created without basic infrastructure. I believe the study will show that in cases where businesses have succeeded on reservations the result is a transfer of significant

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revenues to the surrounding community and many new jobs. Tax policy changes that encourage investments in tribal infrastructure need to be backed by hard data."

Contributing to the California Tribal Nations Economic Impact Study are the members of the state's most prominent and largest tribal associations. They include the California Nations Indian Gaming Association (CNIGA), the Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN), and the California Association of Tribal Governments (CATG).

The California Nations Indian Gaming Association (CNIGA) founded in 1988, is non-profit organization comprised of 26 federally recognized tribal governments. Dedicated to the purpose of protecting the inherent sovereign right of Indian tribes to have gaming on federally recognized Indian lands, it acts as planning and coordinating agency for legislative, policy, legal and communication efforts on behalf of its members. It also serves as an industry forum for information and resources.

The Tribal Alliance of Sovereign Indian Nations (TASIN) is an intergovernmental association of 10 federally recognized tribal governments throughout Southern California. Its members are pioneers in the Indian gaming industry and consistently take the lead on statewide issues affecting tribal governments.

California Association of Tribal Governments (CATG) is the state-wide association of California tribes. CATG promotes understanding of tribal self-government, self-determination, and economic interests consistent with the common bonds of culture, history, trade, and association among all California tribes. CATG activities strengthen tribal government relations with the federal and state government, preserve tribal lands and resources, protect tribal reserved rights, and build tribal economies, each a separate sovereign government involved in providing for the health, safety, and welfare of its tribal members. Its mission is to protect and nurture the sovereign rights of California tribes and provide a dialogue between tribes themselves, the state of California, and the federal government.

Beacon Economics LLC is home to some of California's leading economic researchers and consultants. The firm's internationally recognized forecasters were among the first and most accurate predictors of the U.S. mortgage meltdown-- and among a relative handful to correctly calculate the depth and breadth of the financial and economic crises that followed. Beacon Economic's clients range from the California State Controller to the Natural Resources Defense Fund to one of Wall Street's most successful hedge funds.

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