



## Class II: The Key to Oklahoma's Success

by David Qualls

The time of year has come again for the member tribes of the Oklahoma Indian Gaming Association (OIGA), tribal officials, and attendees from all over the nation to gather for the 18th Annual OIGA Conference and Trade Show. Our show is already the second largest tribal gaming convention in the nation, and with over 2,000 attendees expected in downtown Oklahoma City for the conference, it will be even bigger this year!

The growth of the OIGA Conference and Trade Show should be no surprise, because it mirrors both the success of the tribal gaming industry in Oklahoma and, more importantly, the sustained job creation and revenue growth that the tribal gaming industry has brought to the state.

A recent report by a leading comprehensive annual survey of gaming in the U.S. showed that in 2010 alone gaming across the state had grown to nearly 2.33 percent of Oklahoma's economy. It's no secret that tribal gaming is the most signifi-

cant portion of that growth. In fact, of the \$210 million in total revenue generated from gaming in 2010, \$99.8 million came from tribal casinos and resorts, with the remaining revenue generated from the Oklahoma Lottery and the state's racetracks.

Paramount to the success of gaming in Oklahoma is our Class II industry. The operations in the state make up 60% of the Class II market in the country and have been our bedrock since we began putting them on the floors in the late 1990s. That success continues to this day. Because of its importance, the OIGA member tribes have been involved in the latest efforts aimed at amending the federal regulations on Class II Technical Standards and the Class II Minimum Internal Standards. OIGA was pleased to have three Oklahoma tribal representatives on the Tribal Advisory Committee (TAC) that was appointed by the National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC) Chairwoman Tracie Stevens in October of 2011. We were even more pleased to see the recommendations the TAC forwarded to the Commission.

The revisions proposed by the TAC to the technical standards would advance tribal sovereignty by allowing more choices to tribes involved in governmental gaming, including allowing continuation of the use of existing Class II games which would increase the economic benefits to tribes using those existing games, particularly in areas of limited player participation. The revisions proposed by the TAC to the MICS would substantially increase the ability of tribal gaming regulators to more effectively address changes in technology and more efficiently adopt new best practices. Adoption of those proposed revisions would significantly increase the effective regulation of Class II gaming.

The NIGC published proposed rules in the Federal Register on June 1, 2012. We commend Chairwoman Stevens, Vice Chair Cochran, and Commissioner Little for working closely with OIGA to adopt regulations that will be a great benefit to all of Indian Country. Many of the TAC recommendations were included in the proposed rules, and the OIGA will continue to work with the NIGC to insure that the best amendments are included in the final rules.

So as we gather in Oklahoma City this month, let's come together as tribes, states, local communities, government agencies, associations, and people to bring a successful conclusion to these regulations that are fair, improve effective regulation, and, most importantly, which will continue the tremendous success the Oklahoma tribes have shared with our friends and neighbors. ♠

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