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Native Unity

NATIVE UNITY DIGEST: The Native American people need to find a way to pull together to become more visible to the rest of the world. This concept is being promoted in the Digest through news articles, features, OP/ED pieces and contributor submissions on all aspects of Native life and tribal cultures throughout the U.S. and Canada. Bobbie Hart O'Neill, editor, NAJA member.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2004

Miwok Membership Rolls Opened For Casino

To build a \$100 million casino, the lone Band of Miwok Indian membership rolls were opened by the regional Bureau of Indian Affairs officials to add hundreds of people to the membership list. Among the new members were several BIA employees and dozens of their relatives.

The regional BIA officials opened the membership against the traditional leader's wishes to include members from two other bands in the area. Federal officials then oversaw an August 2002 election that swapped the old leadership for a pro-casino group which includes some BIA officials themselves.

Before the BIA officials became involved, The lone Band had about 70 members living on land some 40 miles southeast of Sacramento in the rolling hills of one of California's wine districts. Now, the band membership has swelled to 535. None of the new members is related to the original 70.

Amy Dutschke, a member of another American Indian group whose family has roots in the lone area, was the BIA's acting regional director in June, 2002 when she authorized the lone's Band's last leadership election.

Now, Dutschke and 68 of her relatives are on the tribe's official list of registered voters, which include an uncle and a niece who also work for Indian Affairs. The election produced five new tribal leaders, four of whom are related to Dutschke.

The election was overseen by Indian Affairs employee Carol Rogers-Davis, whom the BIA named chairman of the elections board. Davis, now, has three relatives on the tribal roll.

Opposition members are challenging Dutschke's standing within the tribe stating that her association with the lone Band is based on the information that a second cousin of Dutschke was once allowed to live on the lone Band's property because his sister was married to the tribal chief at the time.

The tribe is now potentially eligible for millions of dollars in federal benefits. Its new leaders have been given \$1.9 million from the state's Tribal Revenue Sharing Trust Fund in which tribes with casinos contribute to non-gaming tribes. The money is being used to offer members emergency assistance with housing, health care and energy bills.

Four congressmen have called for an investigation though federal officials have declined to intervene. The Department of Interior's inspector general also declined to investigate telling the complaining congressmen who have

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called for that investigation that it was an internal tribal matter.

The lone Band is seeking permission to acquire 208 acres in Plymouth, California to build a 2,000 slot machine casino which is estimated to bring in \$185 million a year to the tribe. Permission has to come from the Department of the Interior Secretary Gale Norton and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger.

This article has been edited from a February 23rd AP Story bylined Don Thompson.

Native Unity - A place for Native American Peoples to solidify their tribes to make a positive impact on the cultural, social, economic and political fabric of American society and a place for non-Natives to better understand the ways of the American Indian.

posted by Bobbie Hart O'Neill @ 2:35 PM



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Pro-casino BIA staff swells ranks of tiny, poor tribe

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PLYMOUTH, Calif. - A once-tiny, nearly destitute American Indian tribe is pushing hard to build a \$100 million casino - but it's not traditional tribal members gunning for riches.

Hundreds of people have been added to the Ione Band of Miwok Indians' membership rolls, which were opened up by regional Bureau of Indian Affairs officials. Among the new members are several BIA employees and dozens of their relatives.

Four congressmen have called for an investigation, though federal officials have so far declined to intervene. Rep. Nick Rahall, ranking Democrat on the House Resources Committee, called the BIA's move an apparent "coup d'etat" that should make other tribes "tremble with fear."

Regional BIA officials opened the membership against the traditional leaders' wishes to include members from two other bands in the area. The federal officials then oversaw an Aug. 10, 2002, election that swapped the old leaders for a pro-casino group that includes some of the BIA employees themselves.

Before the Bureau of Indian Affairs became involved, the Ione Band had about 70 members living on land near Ione, about 40 miles east of Sacramento in the rolling hills of one of California's wine regions. The band's membership has swelled to 535. None of the new members is related to the original 70.

Matt Franklin, the new tribal chairman recognized by the BIA, said he could provide documents proving the legitimacy of the tribe's expanded membership. However, Franklin did not produce the documents after repeated requests from The Associated Press over several weeks.

In Washington, the Bureau of Indian Affairs relied on the tribal election committee's decision to refuse to investigate its own employees' involvement.

The Department of Interior's inspector general also declined to investigate, telling the complaining congressmen that it was an internal tribal matter.

The tribe is now potentially eligible for millions of dollars in federal benefits. Its new leaders received \$1.9 million from the state's Tribal Revenue Sharing Trust Fund, in which tribes with casinos contribute to non-gambling tribes. The tribe says it is using that money to offer members emergency assistance with housing, health care and energy bills.

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