THE GOONZETTE

The Casino Question: When Economic Development Meets Sovereignty Politics

The recent flurry of state legislative activity targeting tribal gaming operations tells us everything we need to know about how non-Native politicians view tribal sovereignty—as a convenience when it serves their interests, and an obstacle when it doesn't.

Last month alone, we've seen bills introduced in three states attempting to regulate tribal gaming operations, impose additional taxation schemes, and require new forms of state oversight. The common thread? Each proposal treats tribal governments like municipal authorities subject to state whims, rather than sovereign nations with inherent governmental powers.

Let's be clear about what's happening here. These aren't good-faith negotiations between governments. They're power plays designed to extract revenue from successful tribal enterprises while undermining the legal foundation that made those enterprises possible in the first place.

The irony runs deep. Many of these same states celebrated tribal gaming when it promised economic development in struggling rural areas. They welcomed the jobs, the infrastructure investment, and yes, the tax revenue from non-gaming operations. But now that tribal nations have built sustainable economic engines—often becoming the largest employers in their regions—suddenly there's concern about "fairness" and "level playing fields."

This selective application of sovereignty principles isn't new. It's the same logic that allowed states to disclaim jurisdiction when tribal communities faced poverty and neglect, only to reassert authority when those same communities achieved economic success. The pattern reveals something uncomfortable: mainstream America's comfort with tribal sovereignty directly correlates with tribal economic weakness.

The legal landscape, however, tells a different story. The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) created a framework for tribal-state compacts precisely because Congress recognized tribal governments' sovereign

authority to regulate gaming on their lands. States participate in this process not as superior authorities, but as neighboring governments negotiating agreements between equals.

Yet in practice, compact negotiations often resemble hostage situations more than diplomatic proceedings. States leverage their authority over off-reservation infrastructure, labor regulations, and environmental permitting to extract concessions that have nothing to do with gaming regulation. They demand revenue sharing that exceeds what they'd receive from comparable state-licensed operations, justified by vague references to "exclusivity" rights they never actually provided.

The current push for additional state oversight represents an escalation of this dynamic. Some proposals would require tribal gaming operations to submit to state auditing procedures that duplicate existing federal oversight. Others would impose new licensing requirements on tribal gaming employees, creating state veto power over tribal hiring decisions.

These measures aren't about consumer protection or regulatory compliance. They're about establishing precedents for state authority over tribal governmental operations. Today it's gaming audits; tomorrow it could be environmental regulations, child welfare standards, or taxation of tribal businesses.

Smart tribal leaders recognize this trajectory and are responding strategically. Rather than accepting incremental erosions of authority, they're pushing back with comprehensive positions that reassert core sovereignty principles. They're also diversifying their economic bases to reduce dependence on state cooperation, developing renewable energy projects, technology enterprises, and other businesses that operate more clearly within federal regulatory frameworks.

The federal government's role remains crucial but inconsistent. While federal courts generally uphold tribal sovereignty principles, federal agencies often defer to state concerns in ways that undermine those same principles. The Department of Interior's approach to gaming approvals, for instance, has become increasingly conservative, making tribal communities more dependent on state compact negotiations.

This creates opportunities for strategic advocacy. Tribal leaders who can articulate sovereignty principles in economic development terms often find receptive audiences among federal officials who might otherwise default to state positions. The key is framing sovereignty not as an abstract legal concept, but as a practical governance framework that produces measurable results.

The path forward requires both defensive and offensive strategies. Defensively, tribal governments must resist each incremental encroachment on their authority, understanding that small concessions create large precedents. Offensively, they should pursue economic and political partnerships that strengthen their negotiating positions over time.

Most importantly, these sovereignty battles must be understood within their broader context. They're not really about gaming regulation or revenue sharing. They're about whether tribal nations will be permitted to exercise meaningful self-governance in an era of economic success, or whether sovereignty will remain a concept honored only in proportion to tribal powerlessness.

The answer will shape not just tribal gaming, but the entire future of tribal self-determination. That makes every compact negotiation, every legislative fight, and every court case a referendum on the question that's defined federal Indian law since contact: whether this country can accommodate truly sovereign tribal nations, or only the illusion of sovereignty wrapped around continuing dependence.

The Digital Palimpsest: How Internet Aesthetics Devour Memory While Performing Innocence

*C'*est curieux*, this perpetual hunger we have developed for the beautiful image, this endless scroll through curated moments that blur the boundaries between authentic experience and algorithmic performance, where every sunset becomes a potential story post and every meal transforms into content, creating what I can only describe as a kind of digital bulimia of the soul that simultaneously gorges itself on visual stimuli while remaining perpetually malnourished by the absence of genuine encounter with the world beyond the screen's luminous rectangle.

The internet aesthetic—if we can call it singular when it fragments into a thousand micro-movements each week, from cottagecore to dark academia to whatever hybrid emerges from TikTok's relentless churn —operates as both colonizer and colonized, imposing Western visual codes while simultaneously cannibalizing local expressions of beauty, transforming the *sari* into festival fashion, reducing traditional crafts to #aesthetic content, flattening centuries of cultural meaning into the two-dimensional space of the Instagram square where context dies but engagement thrives.

What fascinates me most profoundly is how these digital aesthetics perform a kind of temporal violence, plucking visual elements from their historical moorings—the Victorian governess dress, the Japanese tea ceremony, the brutalist architecture that once housed revolutionary dreams—and reassembling them into a pastiche that serves not memory but forgetting, creating what Susan Sontag might have recognized as a new form of camp if she had lived to witness teenagers performing 18th-century aristocracy in their suburban bedrooms while capitalism burns the world outside their ring lights.

The melancholy here runs deeper than nostalgia; it is the sadness of witnessing beauty become currency in an attention economy that transforms every genuine impulse toward creation into content, where the young artist who once might have sketched in solitude now performs their process for an audience of

strangers, their creative practice inevitably shaped by the invisible pressure of the algorithm's preferences, the need for engagement, the requirement that art justify itself through metrics rather than meaning.

Mais voilà, we cannot dismiss these digital aesthetics as mere superficiality, for they represent genuine attempts at self-expression within the constraints of platform capitalism, young people especially creating visual languages that speak to desires the dominant culture refuses to acknowledge—the longing for ritual in a secular world, the hunger for beauty in environments designed for efficiency, the need for community in spaces that privilege individual performance over collective meaning.

The violence of aesthetic appropriation online mirrors older colonial patterns: the extraction of visual wealth from marginalized communities, the sanitization of struggle into style, the way traditional practices become trends divorced from their spiritual or cultural significance, consumed and discarded by audiences who mistake consumption for appreciation, who confuse the adoption of surface elements with genuine cultural exchange or understanding.

Consider how "dark academia" aesthetics romanticize elite educational institutions while ignoring their role in perpetuating class hierarchies, how "cottagecore" fantasizes rural simplicity while erasing the labor conditions of actual agricultural workers, how wellness culture appropriates Indigenous and Eastern spiritual practices while maintaining the individualistic framework that makes such practices necessary as balm for capitalist alienation—each aesthetic movement revealing what Fredric Jameson identified as capitalism's ability to absorb and commodify its own critique.

Yet within this dystopian marketplace of images, I detect something almost touching: the persistent human need to make life beautiful, to find visual coherence in chaos, to create meaning through arrangement and color and light, even when the platforms that host these efforts profit from the data these creative acts generate, even when the images themselves become advertisements for lifestyles most viewers cannot afford, even when the pursuit of aesthetic perfection becomes another form of self-surveillance and social control.

Au fond, internet aesthetics represent both the democratization of visual culture and its ultimate capture by market forces, offering everyone access to the tools of image-making while ensuring that image-making serves the interests of surveillance capitalism, creating a paradox where authentic self-expression becomes impossible precisely through its endless facilitation, where the means of aesthetic production

multiply while aesthetic freedom diminishes, trapped within the algorithmic preferences that determine what beauty gets seen and what gets buried in the digital unconscious where deleted posts go to die.

The screen flickers, the trend changes, the aesthetic pivots, and we continue scrolling, hungry ghosts seeking nourishment from images that promise everything and deliver only the need for more images, *plus ça change*, plus we forget what we were looking for in the first place.