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ADWATCH

Indians' pitch for Prop. 1A



Mark Macarro, the chairman of the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians of Riverside County, calls Proposition 1A a matter of "Indian self-reliance" in the TV commercial.

Proponents of Proposition 1A are airing 60-second television commercials supporting a measure on the March 7 ballot that would let California Indian tribes offer Nevada-style gambling. Following is a description of the spot and an analysis by Patrick Hoge of The Bee's Capitol Bureau:

►VISUALS AND NARRATION:

Mark Macarro, the pony-tailed chairman of the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians of Riverside County, appears wearing blue jeans and a blue shirt with a bola tie. He walks forward and stands next to a tree in front of a dry creek bed and says:

"Last year, California voters overwhelmingly passed Proposition 5, the Indian self-reliance initiative. Indian gaming has transformed the lives of California Indians. Gaming has replaced welfare with work, despair with hope and dependency with self-reliance, and it has allowed us to provide better health care, housing and education for our people. Unfortunately, the same big Nevada casinos that wanted to kill competition from Indians were able to overturn Prop. 5 on a technicality. Now, Proposition 1A has been put on the March ballot to resolve this issue and establish once and for all that gaming on our own tribal lands is legal. The issue is simple: If Prop. 1A is not passed, Indian casinos in California could be shut down, and the jobs and economic benefits they provide will be lost. Please help us take this final step to make Indian self-reliance a reality. Vote yes on Prop. 1A. Thank you."

►ANALYSIS: Macarro's statement that gambling has "transformed the lives of California Indians" is somewhat misleading because only a small fraction of the state's Indian population belongs to the 41 tribes that have casinos. Many of the state's 107 federally recognized tribes will never be able to support casinos because their reservations are geographically remote. Some individual Indians have become enormously wealthy, and gambling tribes have generally been able to fund important services for their members.

The statement that Proposition 5 was overturned on a "technicality" is inaccurate. The state Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 5, which was written to allow Indian gambling to continue, was invalid because the California Constitution specifically bans Nevada-style gambling. Indeed, Proposition 1A would amend the constitution to exempt tribes from that prohibition and let tribes operate casinos.

Macarro does not say that Proposition 1A was put on the ballot by the state Legislature with the support of Gov. Gray Davis, who negotiated side agreements — called compacts — that will require gambling tribes to share revenue with non-gambling tribes.

It is true that if voters do not approve Proposition 1A, the U.S. Justice Department could seek court orders shutting down all of the Nevada-style Indian gambling operations, which include slot machines and blackjack.