

Indian tribe gaming gains keep growing

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By Gary Rotstein, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Every year more Indian tribes are entering the gambling industry to help overcome hundreds of years of economic disadvantages suffered by Native Americans.

Not every tribe thrives by it, as many are in areas far removed from population centers, especially in Western states. But there are also stories of great economic success, from Connecticut to Florida to California.

In 2004, the 15 percent growth in Indian gaming revenue to \$19.6 billion continued a trend in which the pace of tribal expansion was faster than that of commercial casinos, according to Alan Meister, an economist with the Analysis Group in California.

He produces the annual Indian Gaming Industry Report, which says Indian gaming has grown to 405 casinos in 30 states and about 39 percent of America's casino revenue. At least 228 tribes are in the gambling business.

While federal law enables tribes to avoid traditional tax obligations, their various revenue-sharing agreements with states resulted in nearly \$900 million in annual government payments in 2004. The agreements, known as compacts, authorize the tribes to develop more broad-based casinos than they would be entitled to automatically under federal law, in return for sharing revenue with the states.

"We're at about 90 percent of the growth we're going to see in [establishing gambling] locations," said Mark Van Norman, executive director of the National Indian Gaming Association. "What we'll see now is more or less building out existing facilities to be destination resorts. They may capture a larger market, with entertainment and world-class golf resorts."

As a result of aggressive development in the 1990s in rural Connecticut, convenient to both the New York City and Boston population centers, the Mohegan and Mashantucket Pequot tribes operate two of the largest casinos in the world in their home state and continue to expand.

They turn over 25 percent of their slot machine revenue to the state of Connecticut. State leaders determined years ago that authorizing the grand casinos and sharing in the fortune from them is better than restricting the Indians to glitzy bingo parlors.

In Florida, the Seminole tribe has been successful in operating Hard Rock hotel-casinos as entertainment centers without a state compact. Tourists have flocked to their Hollywood, Fla., location even though it lacks a full range of table games and only had a type of federally authorized slot machine known as Class II, related to bingo playing. Such machines usually operate more slowly and less profitably than Vegas-style Class III machines.

Florida Gov. Jeb Bush has indicated he is willing to negotiate a compact with more gambling options for the Seminoles this year because Florida voters approved a gambling expansion referendum last March.

California has 54 tribes operating gambling parlors, more than any other state, and some of their expansion proposals under compact discussions with Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger have caused controversy.

The attention those have received, and representation of Indian tribes by indicted Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff, have increased congressional scrutiny of tribal gambling expansion. It's unclear, however, what new regulations may be imposed beyond those the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs and National Indian Gaming Commission already use to oversee the tribes and industry

The Fast Rise and Steep Fall of Jack Abramoff

How a Well-Connected Lobbyist Became the Center of a Far-Reaching Corruption Scandal

By Susan Schmidt and James V. Grimaldi

Washington Post Staff Writers

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Jack Abramoff liked to slip into dialogue from “The Godfather” as he led his lobbying colleagues in planning their next conquest on Capitol Hill. In a favorite bit, he would mimic an ice-cold Michael Corleone facing down a crooked politician’s demand for a cut of Mafia gambling profits: “Senator, you can have my answer now if you like. My offer is this: nothing.”

The playacting provided a clue to how Abramoff saw himself -- the power behind the scenes who directed millions of dollars in Indian gambling proceeds to favored lawmakers, the puppet master who pulled the strings of officials in key places, the businessman who was building an international casino empire.

Abramoff is the central figure in what could become the biggest congressional corruption scandal in generations. Justice Department prosecutors are pressing him and his lawyers to settle fraud and bribery allegations by the end of this week, sources knowledgeable about the case said. Unless he reaches a plea deal, he faces a trial Jan. 9 in Florida in a related fraud case.

A reconstruction of the lobbyist’s rise and fall shows that he was an ingenious dealmaker who hatched interlocking schemes that exploited the machinery of government and trampled the norms of doing business in Washington -- sometimes for clients but more often to serve his desire for wealth and influence. This inside account of Abramoff’s career is drawn from interviews with government officials and former associates in the lobbying shops of Preston Gates & Ellis LLP and Greenberg Traurig LLP; thousands of court and government records; and hundreds of e-mails obtained by The Washington Post, as well as those released by Senate investigators.

Abramoff, now 47, had mammoth ambitions. He sought to build the biggest lobbying portfolio in town. He opened two restaurants close to the Capitol. He bought a fleet of casino boats. He produced two Hollywood movies. He leased four arena and stadium skyboxes and dreamed of owning a pro sports team. He was a generous patron in his Orthodox Jewish community, starting a boys’ religious school in Maryland.

For a time, all things seemed possible. Abramoff’s brash style often clashed with culturally conservative Washington, but many people were drawn to his moxie and his money. He collected unprecedented sums -- tens of millions of dollars -- from casino-rich Indian tribes. Lawmakers and their aides packed his restaurants and skyboxes and jetted off with him on golf trips to Scotland and the Pacific island of Saipan.

Abramoff offered jobs and other favors to well-placed congressional staffers and executive branch officials. He pushed his own associates for government positions, from which they, too, could help him.

He was a man of contradictions. He presented himself as deeply religious, yet his e-mails show that he blatantly deceived Indian tribes and did business with people linked to the underworld. He had genuine inside connections but also puffed himself up with phony claims about his access.

Abramoff’s lobbying team was made up of Republicans and a few Democrats, most of whom he had wined and dined when they were aides to powerful members of Congress. They signed on for the camaraderie, the paycheck, the excitement.

“Everybody lost their minds,” recalled a former

congressional staffer who lobbied with Abramoff at Preston Gates. "Jack was cutting deals all over town. Staffers lost their loyalty to members -- they were loyal to money."

A senior Preston Gates partner warned him to slow down or he would be "dead, disgraced or in jail." Those within Abramoff's circle also saw the danger signs. Their boss had become increasingly frenzied about money and flouted the rules. "I'm sensing shadiness. I'll stop asking," one associate, Todd Boulanger, e-mailed a colleague.

Abramoff declined to comment for this article. "I have advised my client not to speak, except in court," said Neal Sonnett, one of his attorneys. A friend of two decades, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-Calif.), defended Abramoff: "I think he's been dealt a bad hand and the worst, rawest deal I've ever seen in my life. Words like bribery are being used to describe things that happened every day in Washington and are not bribes."

Few of those interviewed would agree to be quoted on the record because of the ongoing investigation by a Justice Department task force. But some who spoke on the condition of anonymity said they look back in amazement at the heady days of Abramoff's rise.

"We weren't outside the box," the former Preston Gates colleague said. "We were outside the universe."

Hints of Trouble

A quarter of a century ago, Abramoff and anti-tax crusader Grover Norquist were fellow Young Turks of the Reagan revolution. They organized Massachusetts college campuses in the 1980 election -- Abramoff while he was an undergraduate at Brandeis and Norquist at Harvard Business School -- to help Ronald Reagan pull an upset in the state.

They moved to Washington, maneuvered to take over the College Republicans -- at the time a sleepy establishment organization -- and transformed it into a right-wing activist group. They were joined by Ralph Reed, an ambitious Georgian whose later

Christian conversion would fuel his rise to national political prominence.

Soon they made headlines with such tactics as demolishing a mock Berlin Wall in Lafayette Park, where they also burned a Soviet leader in effigy. "We want to shock them," Abramoff told *The Post* at the time.

They forged lifelong ties. At Reagan's 72nd-birthday party at the White House, Reed introduced Abramoff to his future wife, Pam Alexander, who was working with Reed. She eventually converted to Judaism and embraced the Orthodox beliefs Abramoff had adopted as a teenager.

Even in those early days, there were hints of the troubles to come. "If anyone is not surprised at the rise and fall of Jack Abramoff, it is me," said Rich Bond, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Abramoff and his crew busted the College Republicans' budget with a 1982 national direct-mail fundraising campaign that ended up "a colossal flop," said Bond, then deputy director of the party's national committee. He said he banished the three from GOP headquarters, telling Abramoff: "You can't be trusted."

Shortly thereafter, Abramoff was running Citizens for America, a conservative grass-roots group founded by drugstore magnate Lewis E. Lehrman. Abramoff was in frequent contact with Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the Reagan White House's Iran-contra mastermind, about grass-roots efforts to lobby Congress for the Nicaraguan contras, according to records in the National Security Archive.

One of Abramoff's most audacious adventures involved Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan rebel leader who had U.S. support but was later found to have ordered the murders of his movement's representative to the United States and that man's relatives. With Savimbi, Abramoff organized a "convention" of anticommunist guerrillas from Laos, Nicaragua and Afghanistan in a remote part of Angola. Afterward, Lehrman fired Abramoff amid a dispute about the handling of the group's \$3 million budget.

Abramoff also worked on behalf of the apartheid South African government, which secretly paid \$1.5 million a year to the International Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit group that Abramoff operated out of a townhouse in the 1980s, according to sworn testimony to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

At the same time, Abramoff dabbled as a Hollywood producer, shepherding an anticommunist movie, "Red Scorpion," starring Dolph Lundgren, filmed in Namibia, which was then ruled by South Africa. Actors in the film said they saw South African soldiers on the set. When the film was released in 1989, anti-apartheid groups demonstrated at the theaters. The movie ran into financial difficulty during and after production, but Abramoff produced a sequel, "Red Scorpion 2."

Mysterious Entrance

When Republicans wrested control of the House from the Democrats in 1994, Abramoff turned his focus back to Washington politics. With Norquist's help, he reinvented himself as a Republican lobbyist on heavily Democratic K Street. Norquist was one of the intellectual architects of the Republican Revolution and a muse for its leader, Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.), soon to be speaker of the House.

Abramoff also counted on his father, who had a wealth of connections from his days as president of the Diners Club credit card company. Frank Abramoff had once looked into operating a casino in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, U.S. territory that includes Saipan. He introduced his son around, and the Marianas became one of the first important clients of the new lobbyist.

Soon the younger Abramoff developed a key alliance with Rep. Tom DeLay, a conservative Republican from Texas who was working his way up in the House leadership. The two met at a DeLay fundraiser on Capitol Hill in 1995, according to a former senior DeLay aide. The aide recalled that Edwin A. Buckham, then DeLay's chief of staff, told his boss: "We really need to work with Abramoff; he is going to be an important lobbyist and fundraiser."

DeLay, a Christian conservative, did not quite know what to make of Abramoff, who wore a beard and a yarmulke. They forged political ties, but the two men never became personally close, according to associates of both men.

Almost from the start, Abramoff struck some rival lobbyists as a strange figure who operated on the margins. He even turned up as a representative of the Pakistani military when Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto went to Washington in 1995 to seek the return of \$600 million the Islamabad government had paid for 28 F-16 fighters. The sale had been blocked by the U.S. government over concerns about Pakistan's nuclear program.

Bhutto's Washington lobbyists were at the Pakistani Embassy savoring her successful meeting with President Bill Clinton when a man in a suit made a mysterious entrance.

"Suddenly, this portly guy steps in and sits down. He says nothing," recalled one of the lobbyists. The Americans asked him to introduce himself. He folded his arms and refused.

"Finally, he says, 'I am Jack Abramoff,'" recalled the lobbyist, a well-connected Democrat. They had never heard of him. Abramoff explained that he was "close to Newt."

The astonished lobbyists for Bhutto learned that Abramoff had traveled to Islamabad and had sold his services to the Pakistani military without the prime minister's knowledge.

In the Senate, Abramoff befriended Republicans and their staffers, along with some Democrats on the appropriations committees. In August 1999, he signed up for the National Republican Senatorial Committee's "Tartan Invitational," in which a half-dozen Republican senators and their aides spent a few days with about 50 lobbyists golfing at the exclusive St. Andrews Links in Scotland.

The following year, Abramoff figured out how to use his clients to fund his own trips to St. Andrews with lawmakers. The first guests were DeLay and his aides.

Team Abramoff

With Norquist's help, Abramoff secured a spot on the transition team for the Interior Department after George W. Bush was elected president in 2000. He tried to place several officials in Interior, including an unsuccessful attempt to land a former Marianas official in the top spot overseeing U.S. territories.

He was able to befriend J. Steven Griles, the deputy interior secretary, e-mails and interviews show. By the summer of 2001, Abramoff was referring to him in an e-mail to a client as "our guy Steve Griles." Federal investigators are now looking into whether Griles interceded on behalf of Abramoff and improperly discussed a job with the lobbyist while in a position to affect his clients. Griles denied any wrongdoing in recent testimony to the Senate.

Abramoff's team also cultivated Roger Stillwell, the Marianas desk officer at the Interior Department. In a recent interview, Stillwell said he accepted dinners at Abramoff's restaurant, Signatures, and tickets to Washington Redskins games. But he said that all those actions occurred while he was a contract employee at Interior, not a federal worker. He also said he sent Abramoff copies of e-mails he sent to his boss, but he noted that none of them contained confidential information and that "there's nothing wrong with doing that."

Abramoff wallowed in his access, real and imagined. When his crack administrative assistant Susan Ralston bolted for a position with White House political adviser Karl Rove, Abramoff told colleagues he had gotten her the job even though it was Ralston's old boss, Reed, who made it happen, her former colleagues said.

Even glowing profiles in the New York Times and Wall Street Journal noting Abramoff's extensive influence and impressive income were not enough. Abramoff quietly paid op-ed columnists thousands of dollars to write favorably about his clients, including one writer for Copley News Service who disclosed this month that he had been paid for as many as two dozen columns since the mid-1990s.

Abramoff drove his colleagues hard, often e-mailing them late into the night. Many more than doubled

their Hill pay when they went to work with him, some earning salaries of \$200,000 to \$300,000.

"He hired a bunch of white, middle-class Irish Catholic guys who wanted to exceed their parents' expectations," said one of the young lobbyists who himself fit that description. "He was always pushing, demanding. He would say, 'We are a family, we will work 24 hours a day, we will win.'"

Team Abramoff included former staffers to DeLay, as well as to Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.), head of the Senate Appropriations panel's Interior subcommittee; Rep. Robert W. Ney (R-Ohio), chairman of the House Administration Committee; Rep. John T. Doolittle (R-Calif.), who has served on the key House committee that oversees tribes; and Sen. Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.), now minority leader.

Abramoff gathered his troops for strategy meetings that were "a great show," rollicking forums where ethical niceties were derided with locker room humor, recalled a former Preston Gates colleague. "Jack would say, 'I gave that guy 10 grand and he voted against me!'" the former associate recalled.

Bill padding was openly discussed, according to Abramoff's Greenberg Traurig e-mails that have been released by the Senate Indian Affairs Committee. For example, in April 2000, Abramoff had lobbyist Shawn Vasell working on a monthly invoice to the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, telling him to "be sure we hit the \$150k minimum. If you need to add time for me, let me know."

An exasperated Vasell e-mailed back: "You only had 2 hours. We are not even close to this number" Abramoff's solution: "Add 60 hours for me," and "pump up" the hours for three or four other lobbyists.

The Choctaws were one of a half-dozen Indian tribes who gave more than \$80 million to Abramoff between 2000 and 2003. Not only were the tribes paying Abramoff's lobbying firm, they were also paying Abramoff's secret outside partner, Michael Scanlon, who charged the Indians millions of dollars for public relations work and split the money with Abramoff. Scanlon's public relations fees did

not have to be disclosed under lobbying rules, thus making it possible for the magnitude of their take from the tribes to be kept from public view. The two dubbed their scheme “Gimme Five,” according to e-mails in which Abramoff disparaged their clients as “morons” and “troglodytes.”

E-mails show that Abramoff put his money into an array of political and personal projects.

The nonprofit Capital Athletic Foundation, for example, allowed him to schmooze with Washington’s movers and shakers at charity affairs. He put a congressional spouse -- Julie Doolittle, wife of the California lawmaker -- on his payroll to plan at least one event. The congressman’s office has said that there was no connection between his wife’s work and official acts.

The foundation was ostensibly created to help inner-city children through organized sports. There is no evidence money went to city kids, but the foundation did fund some of Abramoff’s pet projects: a sniper school for Israelis in the West Bank, a golf trip to Scotland for Ohio congressman Ney and others, and a Jewish religious academy in Columbia that Abramoff founded and where he sent his children to be educated.

Another Abramoff financial vehicle was the nonprofit American International Center, a Rehoboth Beach, Del., “think tank” set up by Scanlon, who staffed it with beach friends from his summer job as a life-guard. The center became a means for Abramoff and Scanlon to take money from foreign clients that they did not want to officially represent. Some of the funds came from the government of Malaysia. Banks and oil companies there were making deals in Sudan, where U.S. companies were barred on human rights grounds. Sudan was among several oil-rich nations in Africa, Asia and the Middle East that Abramoff eyed as venues for lucrative energy deals. Abramoff told associates he wanted to become a go-to person for U.S. companies seeking to do business with oil-patch nations.

But by early 2003, Abramoff’s private dealmaking had spiraled out of control. His religious academy was draining his income, and his restaurants were

hemorrhaging money. He told Scanlon in an e-mail that February that he was at “rock bottom” and needed funds immediately. By the next day, he was frantic. “Mike!!! I need the money TODAY! I AM BOUNCING CHECKS!!!”

‘Enron of Lobbying’

To Abramoff’s rivals in the niche world of tribal lobbying, however, he was still a confounding success.

Team Abramoff was stealing away tribal clients from other lobbyists and charging fees of \$150,000 a month or more -- 10 or 20 times what the Indians had been paying to others. Team members did it by touting their ties to powerful Republicans on Capitol Hill and stoking tribal worries that Congress might try to tax casino proceeds. Abramoff and Scanlon also quietly got involved in tribal elections.

Sen. Byron L. Dorgan (N.D.), the ranking Democrat on the Indian Affairs Committee, remembers first hearing “vague complaints” about Abramoff in June 2003 from three Democratic lobbyists. The tribes had traditionally supported Democrats, but Abramoff was capturing them for Republicans, getting them to boost their contributions and give two-thirds to his party.

There was even more buzz on Capitol Hill about Scanlon, the gregarious former DeLay press aide who had become a multimillionaire almost overnight. His old friends were astonished that Scanlon, then in his early thirties, was traveling to the beach by helicopter and living in a waterfront Rehoboth mansion that he bought for nearly \$5 million in cash. A Louisiana paper, the Town Talk of Alexandria, reported in September 2003 that the Coushatta tribe paid Scanlon’s public relations firm \$13.7 million, a figure that amazed tribal lobbyists as well as some of Abramoff’s colleagues. It was around that time that one colleague, Kevin Ring, learned from one of Abramoff’s assistants that his boss was secretly getting money from Scanlon, according to a source privy to the conversation.

“This could be the Enron of lobbying,” Ring told the colleague.

Rival lobbyists, including some Republicans, were comparing notes about what they considered Abramoff's outrageous conduct.

One of them contacted The Post in fall 2003. In early 2004, The Post published a detailed account of Abramoff's tribal lobbying, showing how four of Greenberg Traurig's Indian clients had paid \$45 million, most of it in fees to Scanlon's firm. Within weeks, Greenberg initiated an internal investigation, Abramoff was ousted and the Senate Indian Affairs Committee began its own inquiry, which unearthed hundreds of incriminating e-mails from Abramoff's Greenberg Traurig computer files.

Abramoff had another problem that few people in Washington knew about.

He and another old friend from College Republican days, Adam Kidan, had purchased in 2000 a fleet of Florida casino boats for \$147.5 million. By 2004, SunCruz Casinos was bankrupt, and the two men were being sued by lenders for \$60 million in loan guarantees, accused of faking a wire transfer for the \$23 million they had promised to put into the deal.

Even more serious, Abramoff and Kidan were targets of a Florida federal grand jury investigating the SunCruz wire transfer. And local authorities were probing the gangland-style slaying of the man who had sold them the cruise line, Konstantinos "Gus" Boulis.

Greenberg Traurig officials have said that they asked Abramoff to resign in March 2004 over unauthorized personal transactions. They have noted that they had no knowledge of his financial arrangement with Scanlon before they received inquiries from The Post.

However, two months before the firm requested Abramoff's resignation, Greenberg lawyers representing Abramoff in the SunCruz bankruptcy summoned Scanlon to the firm's Miami headquarters to ask about the relationship, according to two people close to Scanlon. Scanlon told them he had paid Abramoff \$19 million out of the money he had received in public relations fees from tribal clients. Cesar L. Alvarez, president and chief executive of

Greenberg Traurig, said the firm will not comment on any meeting with Scanlon.

By the spring of 2004, the Justice Department had launched an investigation of Abramoff and Scanlon that quickly developed into a multi-agency task force.

Pressure to Plead

Nearly two years later, Abramoff's legal troubles appear to threaten the careers of many of his colleagues and political allies. Sources familiar with the Justice Department investigation say that half a dozen lawmakers are under scrutiny, along with Hill aides, former business associates and government officials.

Two of Abramoff's former business partners -- Scanlon and Kidan -- have pleaded guilty and have agreed to testify about bribery and fraud in Florida and Washington.

Three men have been arrested in the Boulis killing. Two of the three were Kidan's associates; one of them is known to law enforcement as an associate of the Gambino crime family.

Another former Abramoff associate, David H. Safavian -- most recently head of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy in the Office of Management and Budget -- has been indicted on five felony counts of lying to federal investigators about his dealings with Abramoff while he was chief of staff at the General Services Administration.

Within the past year, Abramoff began selling off assets such as his restaurants and has told his lawyers he is broke. He faces the possibility of lengthy prison sentences and stiff financial penalties that could be reduced if he cooperates.

All these developments have added to the pressure on Abramoff to reach his own deal before the SunCruz trial begins on Jan. 9.

Alan K. Simpson (R), the former Wyoming senator who was in Washington during the last big congressional scandal -- the Abscam FBI sting in the late

1970s and early 1980s, in which six House members and one senator were convicted -- said the Abramoff case looks bigger. Simpson said he recently rode in a plane with one of Abramoff's attorneys, who told him: "There are going to be guys in your former line of work who are going to be taken down."

Dozens of lawmakers -- who were showered with trips, sports and concert tickets, drinks and dinners -- are returning campaign contributions from Abramoff and his clients and calling him a fraud and a crook.

Burns, one of half a dozen legislators under scrutiny by the federal Abramoff task force, returned \$150,000 in campaign contributions this month.

"This Abramoff guy is a bad guy," Burns told a Montana television station. "I hope he goes to jail and we never see him again. I wish he'd never been born, to be right honest with you."

Former Republican congressman Mickey Edwards (Okla.), usually a defender of lobbying and Congress, said there have always been members who get caught "stuffing money in their pants." But he said this is different -- a "disgusting" and disturbingly broad scandal driven by lobbyists whose attitude seemed to be "government to the highest bidder."

"This is at a scale that is really shocking," said Edwards, who teaches public and international affairs at Princeton. "There is a certain kind of arrogance that in the past you might not have had. They were so supremely confident that there didn't seem to be any kind of moral compass here."

Researcher Alice Crites contributed to this report.

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From the Los Angeles Times

Nowhere to Run

Arizona's Tohono O'odham Indians are dirt poor. Some thought smuggling marijuana was the way to strike it rich. Yet it's only adding to the misery.

Don Bartletti

January 8, 2006

The door to the giant warehouse near the Tucson airport swings open, and a musty-mint blast slaps me in the face like a big, soft mitten. The odor is instantly recognizable: It's pot. Lots and lots of pot.

Inside, neatly stacked bales of marijuana stand like faceless chessmen—the evidence from a game of extremes played out every day along the nearby Arizona-Mexico border. Anthony Coulson, the Drug Enforcement Agency official in charge there, says that as much as 20% of the marijuana brought into the state of Arizona during the last year has been discovered in one location: the Tohono O'odham reservation, where a confluence of abject poverty and the opportunity for a fast buck have come to torment the Indian nation.

In 2000, according to the DEA, some 50,800 pounds of marijuana were seized on Tohono land. By last year, the figure had soared to 192,225 pounds. Other authorities put the number even higher. More and more Tohono themselves, meanwhile, have been caught up in the drug trade. “Young Indians,” says Coulson, “carry it over to drop houses” from which the pot eventually finds its way to the streets.

While Indian tribes in other places have hit the jackpot with a lucrative gambling trade, the Tohonos' casino in Tucson has generated little revenue for the reservation residents, and 50% still live in poverty, more than 40% are unemployed and misery abounds. Young people see little in their futures. The day I arrive, 17-year-old Jared Antone is discovered hanging by a rope from a horse trailer, an apparent suicide. The next afternoon, I join his aunt, Verna Enos, at her sister's ranch. Inside the house, in Jared's bedroom, a candle burns on the floor. “We took the bed out to let the spirits escape,” Enos says. Outside, near the horse trailer, she struggles to lift her face toward a twilight sky laced with rose-colored clouds.

On a map, the Tohono O'odham Nation sits like a clenched fist between Tucson and the Mexican border. The U.S.-Mexico boundary is a thin, 70-odd-mile bracelet across the wrist. Near the southeast corner of the reservation are the twin gulches of Sasabe, U.S.A., and Sasabe, Mexico. A gas station and a stylish port of entry are the main attractions on the Arizona side. On the Sonora side, a crucifix towers over a migrant's tiny chapel. Lighted at night, it's a beacon in the desert for another unstoppable diaspora that ebbs and flows.

The border here is so flimsy and porous that it defies belief. No wonder that illegal immigrants—many carrying drugs in burlap sacks as a means of paying for their passage—stream across.

One spot, called the San Miguel Gate, is a 20-foot-wide cattle grate. No door, no lock, no guard. Except, that is, for 66-year-old Olivario Listo Enos. He patrols by himself in his dirty Dodge pickup. “At night when my hounds bark, or in the day when dust rises in the south, I grab my guns, jump in my truck and outsmart ‘em,” Olivario says. “A blast or two over the hood and they stop. When they freeze, I give ‘em a choice: ‘Your women, your drugs or your keys.’ “

Smugglers, he says, always leave the keys. Olivario keeps them in a Ziploc bag, and on this day he shows off 11 vehicles left on his property. “When the Border Patrol comes, they knife the tires so the smugglers won’t come steal the cars back,” he explains. “When the vehicle department in Tucson declares my cars ‘abandoned,’ I sell ‘em for hay to feed my cattle and working horses.”

Most every family, it seems, has been touched by drugs, including some of the reservation’s most elite. In September, Tohono O’odham police stopped a 1996 Chevrolet Lumina for speeding and discovered six bales of marijuana under a blanket in the trunk. The driver, 39-year-old Nicholas C. Juan, was arrested and now awaits trial. He is the brother of Vivian Juan-Saunders, the Tohono chairwoman.

He isn’t the first member of the chairwoman’s family to be caught drug-running. Her sister, Mary Juan, was arrested in May 1999 by U.S. Customs officials after they discovered 15 bales of marijuana stashed in her Pontiac Grand Prix and in a shed on her property. Mary had once been a tribal judge. She was convicted in federal court and spent a year and a day in jail. She’s out now, raising her three grandkids—her daughter-in-law, busted with her six years ago, moved off the property.

I find Mary on a parcel that has been in the family for four generations. Standing outside her small, brown stucco house, she withholds her reasons for marijuana smuggling behind a nearly expressionless face. “It’s better not to bring up the past,” she says. “It makes me think it’s happening all over again.” As she talks, she wipes a tear from her eye.

When I tell Coulson, the DEA agent, that Mary’s place doesn’t look like that of a drug dealer, he isn’t surprised. “There’s little collective wealth from drugs in evidence on the reservation,” he says. “Drug running is not enough to get the Tohono out of poverty—but just enough to kill them.”

Abramoff plea deal could expose officials

By Sean Gardiner
December 31, 2005

Should lawyers for Jack Abramoff hammer out a plea agreement with prosecutors in Washington, D.C., and South Florida, it will be a bank fraud case out of Dania Beach that provided entry for authorities into the usually closed society of congressional bribery and influence peddling.

His trial on charges he fraudulently obtained loans to buy the SunCruz gambling ships is set to begin Jan. 9, and details of a plea agreement are still being worked out, according to sources close to the case. Any deal Abramoff, 47, cuts will require full disclosure in the SunCruz case and any illicit activities he's been a party to during his years of wheeling and dealing on Capitol Hill.

Since 1999, 210 current members of Congress, including six from Florida, have accepted \$4.4 million in contributions from Abramoff, SunCruz or the Indian tribes that hired him to promote gambling legislation, according to figures compiled by the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan, nonprofit group tracking money in politics.

Larry Noble, the center's executive director, said those representatives have to explain what, if anything, was done in exchange for those contributions. "In a lot of the cases there's just going to be embarrassment," he said, explaining that any contribution associated with Abramoff now carries the taint of illegitimacy. For others, however, "it could be a lot more serious," he said.

Michael Scanlon, a former partner of Abramoff's, admitted in his plea agreement that he and Abramoff provided public officials with "a stream of things of value" such as golfing junkets and jobs for relatives in exchange for the officials supporting or passing specific legislation.

In addition to bribery charges, Abramoff and Scanlon are being investigated for allegedly overcharging Indian tribes by millions of dollars.

"I think right now we're still looking at the tip of the iceberg," Noble said. "The question is how deep does it go."

Records released by the Broward State Attorney's Office in November, detail how the seemingly beneficial relationship between a South Florida business tycoon and a group of well-connected Republican operators quickly dissolved into threats, lawsuits and ultimately a murder, prompting an investigation that has proved to have far-reaching tentacles.

In 1999, Greek-born entrepreneur Konstantinos "Gus" Boulis, who had made his fortune in fast food, was forced to strike a secret deal requiring him to sell his controversial SunCruz gambling casinos after the government used an obscure law prohibiting non-U.S. citizens from owning commercial ships.

Abramoff, a short-lived movie producer turned prolific lobbyists, was contacted to find a buyer but soon became interested in SunCruz himself. For the deal he recruited two friends, Adam Kidan, a businessman from New York City, and Ben Waldman, a former press aide for President Ronald Reagan.

Kidan took over the day-to-day negotiations, and later operation, of SunCruz while Abramoff remained in Washington running his lobbying business. Abramoff was rarely seen at SunCruz headquarters and many executives later told detectives they knew "Jack" only as a voice on a teleconference call.

But Abramoff's power and connections were always available for his partners.

On March 30, 2000, three months into the SunCruz negotiations, U.S. Rep. Robert Ney, R-Ohio, placed statements into the Congressional Record calling Boulis one of the few "bad apples" in the gaming industry and accused SunCruz dealers of "cheating passengers by using incomplete decks of cards."

Ney, whose district is 1,300 miles from SunCruz headquarters, received at least \$4,000 in contributions from SunCruz, according to Center for Responsive Politics records. Ney said he returned the SunCruz contributions. He denies wrongdoing and claims he was duped by Abramoff and Scanlon, who provided him with the information.

In the summer of 2000, Abramoff and Kidan obtained \$60 million in financing from Foothill Capital on the condition they pay Boulis \$23 million of their own money at closing. They didn't have the money. So Boulis, Kidan and Abramoff signed and faxed a document stating the \$23 million had been paid when, in fact, the duo only signed promissory notes. That, prosecutors charged, constituted wire and bank fraud.

The deal meant that Boulis was now in for almost \$90 million of the \$147.5 million sales price while the buyers had put up nothing. Waldman explained to the detectives that Boulis initially hoped to get all his money back through a planned initial public offering for the company.

But the company had to be solvent for an IPO. And Frank Amendolia, the former SunCruz comptroller, told the detectives that the new owners were spending willy-nilly. Using checks from a starter checkbook, the new SunCruz owners dropped more than \$300,000 to buy corporate sports suites around Washington, D.C., allowing Abramoff to treat favored clients and powerbrokers. At the same time, the SunCruz private plane, which cost about \$2,000 an hour to run, was ferrying lawmakers and their staffers to golf trips and other junkets all over the world. With Kidan and Abramoff focused on expanding SunCruz, not only in-state but also in New York City and the Pacific island of Saipan, the new SunCruz executives had maxed out their corporate cards a month after the sale. Meanwhile the day-to-day bills piled up, loans were defaulted and it appeared the floating casino business was heading aground.

But while Boulis certainly had a lot of money on the line, Waldman told detectives the split didn't "grow over money. It grew over control."

Kidan began firing Boulis' friends and family members working at SunCruz. So Boulis secretly started making plans to take the company back, Blackburn told detectives. Boulis was intent on either getting alternative financing to buy out the Foothill loans or convincing Foothill to work with him and dump Abramoff and Kidan because they were defaulting on their loans. Either scenario left the Abramoff and Kidan group out in the cold.

As the tensions mounted, an odd solution was devised. Boulis' people were sent to one side of SunCruz's Dania Boulevard headquarters while the new owners took up occupancy on the other. Lawsuits followed, as did a well-publicized fistfight between Kidan and Boulis. Then, on Feb. 6, 2001, Boulis, 51, was shot to death in his car in Fort Lauderdale.

This past September, three men who had worked for Kidan were charged in Boulis' murder. One of them, Anthony "Big Tony" Moscattello, a known associate of John Gotti, told detectives one of his co-defendants said Kidan ordered the hit on Boulis. Kidan, whose lawyer denies that allegation, may reply himself from the stand. Two weeks ago he pleaded guilty in the SunCruz case and agreed to become a cooperating witness. It's unknown yet if state prosecutors will use him as a witness in the Boulis murder case. Federal prosecutors plan to have him testify against Abramoff if necessary.

When reached by phone Wednesday, Kidan declined comment. On Monday, he told Newsday, "I wish I had never met Jack" and admitted, "I played with the big boys and this is the result -- sometimes you go into a business and the upside potential is so great that you close your eyes and look the other way. I looked the other way, and the other way has come back to smack me."

Abramoff faces up to 30 years in prison on the SunCruz charges. His other choice is to follow Kidan's lead. Noble said the specter of Abramoff cooperating in the investigation must make for a "very nervous holiday" this year for some in Congress.

"The line between a bribe and a contribution is thin," Noble said. "It's thin but it's important because it keeps you out of jail."

Indian Faction Asserts Control

One Schaghticoke Group Ousts Another

By RICK GREEN

Courant Staff Writer

January 1 2006

KENT -- A tribal faction has seized control of the Schaghticoke Indian reservation so it can develop property along the Housatonic River.

Members of the faction, the Schaghticoke Indian Tribe, say they have plans for houses and unspecified "economic development."

The latest chapter in the long-running Schaghticoke saga began Friday, when Schaghticoke Indian Tribe members took over the tribe's small office and picnic pavilion, forcing out the rival Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. The two groups - who both claim to represent the historic tribe that has lived here since the 1700s - have been in a nasty and sometimes violent feud since the 1970s.

"The reservation belongs to all Schaghticoke. We want to start our economic development program here," the Schaghticoke Indian Tribe faction's chairman, Alan Russell, said Saturday. A handful of his supporters watched warily as members of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation were forced to remove belongings from the tribal offices.

The reservation - once more than 1,000 acres but winnowed down during hundreds of years of questionable and perhaps fraudulent land sales - has been at the center of a tribal recognition controversy. In October, the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs denied formal federal recognition of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. The recognition was bitterly opposed by leading state politicians and the town of Kent, who feared the tribe would try to open a casino if it won federal recognition.

Russell's group - with its own application for federal recognition pending before the BIA - maintains it is the true Schaghticoke tribe. Like the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation, the Schaghticoke Indian Tribe is also interested in developing a casino or bingo hall.

"We are going to open an office up. We hope to do our ... housing project," said tribal Vice Chairwoman Gail Harrison, who is Russell's sister. "Until the check is in hand, we can't say, but we do have [financial] backers."

This latest Schaghticoke episode may have been set off by comments made by Schaghticoke Tribal Nation Chief Richard Velky. In a letter to the Washington Post published a week ago, he said the tribe still planned to "aggressively" develop reservation land.

Russell, Harrison and supporters moved an office trailer onto the property Friday and told Schaghticoke Tribal Nation members they were taking over the reservation, a 400-acre parcel that includes four homes and the pavilion building, which serves as a tribal meeting area.

On Saturday, Schaghticoke Tribal Nation members said they were pulling back because they had no interest

in clashing with Russell's group. They are focusing on a court appeal of the BIA's recognition decision.

"We've got bigger battles to fight," said Michael Pane, vice chairman of the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation. "I'm just shrugging my shoulders."

Russell's group is "just missing the picture," Pane said as Tribal Nation members quickly moved out Saturday morning. On Friday, Pane and a state police officer had come to the reservation, but no arrests were made.

Reached at home, Velky said Russell's takeover was "ridiculous at this stage of the game."

"We are looking for federal recognition," said Velky, adding that he believes the tribe's other opponents, including the town of Kent, are also behind the Russell group's actions.

Ruth Epstein, first selectwoman in Kent, said she had not heard of the latest altercation on the reservation.

"Obviously the town of Kent has had nothing to do with this," she said Saturday afternoon.

About 8 or 10 Schaghticoke Indian Tribe members and their supporters said Saturday they planned a 24-hour guard on the property, located along a dirt road beside the Housatonic River.

William Buchanan, a businessman from nearby New York state working with Russell's Schaghticoke Indian Tribe, said the rival Schaghticoke Tribal Nation "never had a reservation" in Kent.

"The Schaghticoke Indian Tribe is now in possession of the entire reservation," he said as he stoked a camp fire near the picnic pavilion.

Kevin P. Quill, a New York lawyer advising the Schaghticoke Indian Tribe, said Russell's group is going to explore all options for the property, including the possibility of developing a gambling facility.

"We do not want to change Kent or the surrounding area," said Quill.

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Tribe apologizes for links to lobbyist

Agua Caliente trying to recoup millions paid to Abramoff

The Desert Sun

Debra Gruszecki

January 12, 2006

PALM SPRINGS - Richard Milanovich, chairman of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, apologized Wednesday for his tribe's involvement with a disgraced Washington lobbyist.

With his voice halting, Milanovich apologized.

"It pains me, hurts me to know that the fallout from that (scandal) is affecting all of Indian Country," he said. "I apologize to each and every one of you, and to all of your people, for it happening."

As first reported on thedesertsun.com, while tribal economic prosperity was the theme of the 11th annual gathering of the California Nations Indian Gaming Association, the political corruption scandal held center stage.

Jack Abramoff, the Washington lobbyist, pleaded guilty on Jan. 3 to three felonies that included admissions he defrauded four Indian tribes - not including the Agua Calientes - and other clients, taking millions in kickbacks.

In the fall of 2004, Milanovich testified before a Senate committee that the Agua Caliente tribe paid \$10 million, with one-third of the money being paid to a law firm affiliated with Abramoff and two-thirds going to Tom Scanlon, Abramoff's associate who has also pleaded guilty to fraud.

Milanovich has not said if the tribe felt it gained anything from the \$10 million, saying only that it is working to recoup its losses.

"I can assure you, we are doing our utmost to make certain it is corrected," he told the gathering in the Palm Springs Convention Center.

He said the tribe holds out hope that as Indian Nations work through a cleansing process there will be recognition that tribal leaders were acting in an attempt to better their people.

Abramoff and Scanlon collected \$66 million from six tribes seeking influence in Washington, but tribes now accuse them of overbilling and delivering little.

The corruption scandal involves several members of Congress and their aides. Some legislators have either returned the campaign contributions or donated the money to charities.

Rep. Mary Bono, R-Palm Springs, received \$19,000 from tribes associated with Abramoff, including \$12,000 from the Agua Caliente, according to Political MoneyLine.com, but she has not been involved in the federal investigation.

Clearly moved by Milanovich's apology, Daniel J. Tucker, a former CNIGA chairman, told Milanovich,

“You don’t have to apologize to anyone. We know the tribe, and you.”

Then, Turner turned to CNIGA chairman Anthony Miranda and suggested that he brace for challenges to keep Indian nations unified.

Miranda, of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians, vowed tribes will “not lay down our modern bows and arrows.”

“The same people who want to take away our rights are those who will use the disgraceful acts of lobbyist Jack Abramoff to advance their cause,” Miranda said. “Abramoff violated the trust of Congress, trust of Indians, trust of banks, major corporations and charitable organizations - even his own law firm,” he said. “Now, more than ever, it is vital that tribal leaders be the ones that walk the halls of Congress themselves, and not send representatives.

“We must tell our story to the leaders of America,” he said. “It is no longer an elective. It is a prerequisite for their education and tribal sovereignty.”

Mark Van Norman, executive director of the National Indian Gaming Association, said tribes can expect to see lobbyist reform measures proposed in Washington this year as a result of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee hearings on Abramoff.

Tom Rogers, of Carlyle Consulting, said “opportunity can spring from chaos. We are facing lobbying reform, but Indian Country should call for a best practices institute, so tribes can do their due diligence and background checks” to understand who or what they may be dealing with.

In his keynote address, Miranda said California tribes made “remarkable progress” in 2005, surpassing many milestones beyond the 50,000 tax-paying jobs the gaming industry created and providing \$30 million to local governments through the Indian Gaming Special Distribution Fund.

In San Diego, the Jamul Indian Village broke ground on its economic development project after years of struggle, Miranda said. The La Jolla Band of Luiseño Indians of San Diego is moving ahead with plans to build a 35,000-square foot casino south of Palomar Mountain.

“We have made progress but we have a long way to travel before we catch up to the rest of America,” he said, holding up a study researchers at the University of California, Riverside, just completed as a baseline to gauge the effect of tribal gaming in California.

“Despite our relative progress, tribal gaming has brought to some of our people, the average income for American Indians in California is well below the national average.”

In 1990, the study showed 36 percent of families within gaming tribes were living in poverty. By 2000, it improved only slightly to 26 percent. By comparison, the percentage of California and American families in poverty is between 9 and 10 percent, Miranda said.

“Clearly, we need to do more to combat poverty on Indian reservations,” he said.

To begin the effort, Miranda proposed an economic summit of all tribes to devise a comprehensive approach to the problem.

“We cannot leave our brothers and sisters behind, lest our collective dream of self sufficiency be unfulfilled,” he said. “We need to work together to find ways for all tribes to have a fair chance at realizing this dream.”

State of the Tribes

In his keynote address to the California Nations Indian Gaming Assn. convention, cIn his keynote address to the California Nations Indian Gaming Association convention, Anthony Miranda of the Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians also: made these points:

Extended an olive branch to Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, commending him for recognizing economic conditions afflicting non-gaming tribes and calling for face-to-face meetings in the future with tribal leaders.

Expressed pride in the enactment of Assembly Bill 1750, which distributes revenue sharing payments to tribes on a quarterly basis.

Recognized an historic first, a display honoring tribal governments in the rotunda of the State Capitol.

Proposed a task force of problem gaming experts, tribal leaders, industry partners and policymakers to develop recommendations to promote and share the responsibility for responsible gaming throughout California.

Loyal Mdewakanton win court battle

January 02, 2006

by: David Melmer / Indian Country Today

MINNEAPOLIS - Membership in a Dakota tribe is expected to more than double after an accurate list of lineal descendants of the Loyalist Mdewakanton is compiled and verified, as ordered by a federal court.

U.S. Court of Federal Claims Judge Charles Lettow has denied a U.S. Justice Department motion to reconsider his earlier ruling that gave the descendants of the Loyalist Mdewakanton rights to land in Minnesota.

Lettow also ruled that the federal government breached its trust obligations to the Loyalist Mdewakantons and their descendants when in a 1980 congressional act it put the land into trust for three federally recognized Dakota communities - Prairie Island, Shakopee and Lower Sioux. That act violated an 1886 contract signed by Mdewakanton leader John Bluestone, which gave that land to the Mdewakanton who were descendants of those who pledged loyalty to the United States in 1862.

Previously the land was either assigned to individual loyalists or leased, with the proceeds from the lease paid to the loyalists.

The loyalists want the land returned to them and Mdewakanton tribal membership, with full political power, restored. Lease revenues that were given to groups other than the loyalist's lineal descendants constitutes a breach of the contractual agreement by the federal government, the plaintiffs argued. Today's lineal descendants want compensation for the lost revenues.

Lettow's latest decision rejected the federal government's claim that it didn't mismanage the trust on behalf of the lineal descendants. He also rejected the argument that the 1886 contract did not authorize a trust responsibility to the loyalists.

Lettow ordered the government to perform an accounting to determine the size of financial compensation that is owed the loyalists' descendants.

The loyalists assert that the litigation is not about money: it is about principle, political power and justice. And it's about land, said Barbara Feezor Buttes, great-granddaughter of John Bluestone.

"We've won a tremendous victory and we've done this as a grass-roots movement. It was done in a respectful way. It is so exciting," Buttes said.

Buttes' grandmother, Louise Bluestone Smith, began the process of identifying those descendants of her father's era that had been left out of membership in the three tribes. Bluestone Smith died before a clear ruling could be made. Buttes said her grandmother wanted to find and identify all the people and bring them in.

"These were the things she talked about when she passed away," Buttes said.

A problem has arisen: The three tribes own successful casinos located on the land in question. And the Shakopee Community, located at Prior Lake, Minn., is on 258 acres of land that was awarded to Bluestone. The Shakopee wants to keep its membership at 186; but the current collection of descendency data indicates that

membership would increase to 2,000.

The membership of the Mdewakanton could increase by more than 2,500 people - all lineal descendants of the original 208 loyalists. The loyalists have spent more than two years collecting data on band members with the intention of reuniting the land and the people.

Many of the Shakopee Band's elected officials are not eligible for membership in the band because they have no connection to the loyalists, Buttes said. "This will come out" when the membership list is compiled.

Stanley Crooks, chairman of the Shakopee Band, had no comment. The Department of the Interior did not respond by press time.

"We need to present this from a modern perspective," said Erick Kaardal, attorney for the loyalists. "I think it is a very compelling story that you have someone saying, 'Look, I am Mdewakanton and why are all these other people here?'"

The end result could mean that a new tribal government would be formed. Buttes said this government should have several districts and one district at large because most of the people are at large.

"The way it is now, there is no equality. With one government there could be equality," she said.

Most Dakota were removed from Minnesota in 1863 in retaliation for the 1862 conflict that left many settlers and Dakota dead. The largest mass hanging in this country's history took place in Mankato in 1862, when 38 Dakota men were hanged in front of a large gathering of settlers.

Under the federal displacement policy of the mid-19th century, many of the lineal descendants were scattered throughout the region and many sent to the Crow Creek Reservation in South Dakota. To the Mdewakanton, who originally lived along the Minnesota River, Crow Creek was a stark spot on the prairie along the Missouri River. Most could not survive the ordeal: many died en route or succumbed to starvation after they arrived.

Many Dakota eventually went down the Missouri River to the site in Nebraska now occupied by the Santee Sioux Reservation.

Anyone who believes they are lineal descendants of the original 208 loyalists from 1862 have until April 28, 2006 to get their names placed on the roll - they may have a claim to the economic benefits and also to the land.

Many of the 2,500 who have already been identified come from the three communities in Minnesota, and others from the nine reservations in South Dakota and the Santee Reservation in Nebraska.

American Indian Media: Tribes' Greed Led Them Into Abramoff Scandal

News Feature/Analysis, Pete Micek,

New America Media, Jan 11, 2006

Editor's Note: Native American media say that several Indian tribes are players, not victims, in the scandal involving lobbyists Jack Abramoff, Michael Scanlon and members of Congress.

SAN FRANCISCO--American Indian media give little sympathy to tribes involved with Washington, D.C., lobbyists Michael Scanlon and Jack Abramoff, currently under investigation for buying influence in Congress on behalf of clients, including Indian gaming interests.

"There is some suggestion Jack Abramoff victimized unwary tribes and politicians," says former Native American Times editor Louis Gray in a guest editorial in the Oklahoma-based newspaper, "but this is more a case of unbridled greed than people taking advantage of powerless tribes and corrupting innocent politicians."

"It would be easy to play the victim card," Gray writes, "but that would be avoiding the responsibility many tribes had in their unrelenting drive to protect and obtain more gaming opportunities."

The weekly newspaper, distributed in Oklahoma and New Mexico, updates its Web site several times per day. Gray's editorial, headlined, "Abramoff Scandal Is About Players, Not Victims," says gaming created heretofore unknown wealth and jobs among poor Native Americans. "But at what price and when is it enough?" he asks. Gray says that Abramoff and his tribal clients share blame for mismanagement of funds.

Abramoff pled guilty Jan. 3 to charges of tax evasion, mail fraud and conspiracy. He will cooperate with authorities in an ongoing investigation and therefore receive a lighter prison sentence. More than a month earlier, his former partner Michael Scanlon admitted conspiring to defraud Indian tribes and corrupt public officials.

The two lobbyists stand accused of bilking six tribes out of more than \$82 million between 2001 and 2004, reports Indian Country Today (ICT), an upstate New York-based newspaper owned by the Oneida Nation. The Washington, D.C., lobbyists kept two-thirds of the money, said Gale Courey Toensing, a reporter for the 25-year-old newspaper, in an article titled "Abramoff pleads guilty to federal charges."

One tribe, the Coushatta of Louisiana, gave Scanlon "and related entities" more than \$30 million, according to the article. Scanlon redirected nearly half, \$11.5 million, to Abramoff, ICT reports.

Coushatta attorney Jimmy Faircloth claims the tribe is "outraged" at Abramoff and "very satisfied" with his legal situation, according to ICT. "The tribe believed Abramoff had the secret handshake to Washington," Faircloth told ICT, "and they followed him down that path."

Politicians bought into the lavish gifts and arrangements the lobbyists prepared for them. Representative Robert W. Ney, a Republican from Ohio, took a golf trip to Scotland with Abramoff and others, according to ICT. He placed two speeches into the Congressional Record on behalf of Abramoff's efforts to take over the Sun Cruz Casino Lines.

Abramoff and another former partner, Adam Kidan, bought the casino fleet from a Miami businessman, who later turned up dead in a “gangland-type” slaying, ICT reports. Abramoff and Kidan were indicted in Florida on conspiracy and wire fraud charges in connection with that purchase, according to the newspaper.

The golf trip also connects House Majority Leader Tom DeLay to Abramoff, according to e-mails released during a Senate Indian Affairs Committee investigation.

Politicians responded to the “Mother’s Milk,” or money and publicity, offered by Abramoff, Louis Gray says in the Native American Times editorial. Are they working for the public, Grey wonders, or for their own interests? “Their actions say they worked for men like Abramoff, who in turn worked for the highest bidder of his services.” Gray continues, “Tribes are not the innocent lambs in the forest they once were. Many of those in gaming have powerful people working for them and dispensing advice in important deliberations.”

From the tribes to the lobbyists to politicians, Gray says, no one said “No” to the powerful influence of money.

At least one tribe watches the scandal with a wary eye. The Navajo Nation, says Duane Beyal, editor of Navajo Times newspaper in Arizona, looks to build casinos. The tribe’s Washington, D.C., office does its own lobbying, he said, and rarely relies on outside consultants. Though untouched by the scandal, he says, “We’re watching it from a distance.”

“The part that is hard to believe,” says Victor Rocha of the gaming news Web site Pechanga.Net, “is the amount of money the tribes gave [the lobbyists].” They took advantage of and belittled the tribes, he said, while also defending some tribes and their “ancestral” territory from development. His Web site’s “Quote of the Day” on Friday, Jan. 6, delivered support from the National Indian Gaming Association for the prosecution of Abramoff and “other offenders like Mr. Scanlon, who knowingly conspired with him, to the full extent of the law.”

The Abramoff case worries editors of Indian Country Today, who write, “Just with that particular media-frenzied case, the image of Indians can transform from that of longstanding tribes progressively seeking justice in America, to one of A) newly-rich victim of Washington corruption or B) greedy manipulators attempting to buy favors from political power.” Though the labels might apply to the tribes caught in the scandal, they do not fit the rest of Indian country, editors said.

To avoid such characterizations, Native Americans must take control of their image presented to Americans.

“The magic wand,” says editor Jose Barreiro, “is not in millions of dollars for one guy to buy off people, but for supporting the culture from inside.”

Abramoff, clients gave thousands to California officials

MICHAEL R. BLOOD

Associated Press

January 5, 2006

LOS ANGELES - Disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff or Indian tribes he once represented donated tens of thousands of dollars to members of Congress from California, and some returned the money or will donate it to charity, officials said.

The California list was headed by House Resources Committee Chairman Richard Pombo, R-Tracy, whose political committees received \$54,500 from Abramoff or the tribes, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan watchdog group that analyzed political contributions from 1999 to 2005.

The largest donation to Pombo, \$10,000, came from the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the report said.

He was followed by Rep. John T. Doolittle, R-Rocklin, whose political committees banked \$50,000, the center said. Four other state representatives received \$10,000 or more from Abramoff or tribes he had represented.

As Abramoff pleaded guilty to a second set of felony charges in as many days, this time in Florida, numerous congressional Republicans as well as President Bush shed campaign donations linked to the once-powerful lobbyist.

Two political committees for Rep. Mary Bono, R-Palm Springs, received \$21,500 from tribes represented by Abramoff, but no donations from the lobbyist directly. Those tribes included the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, the Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana and the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the report said.

Her chief of staff, Frank Cullen Jr., said Wednesday that her relationship with the tribes was long-standing and a review by staff found no reason to return the money.

If Bono “felt these contributions were directly linked to Jack Abramoff in any way, she would return the donation or donate an equal amount to charity,” Cullen said. He added that Bono had never been lobbied by Abramoff and recalled meeting him once, briefly.

Wayne Johnson, a political consultant for Pombo, said the congressman received \$7,000 in donations from Abramoff directly, which he has donated to charity.

“We read some very negative things and decided ... it was better to pass those (donations) on,” Johnson said. “I don’t think anyone wants to foster an impression of impropriety.”

Johnson said he was unaware of what tribes had been represented by Abramoff. According to the report, Pombo received \$47,500 from tribes linked to Abramoff.

According to the report, Rep. Dana Rohrabacher, R-Huntington Beach, received \$12,500 from Abramoff

or tribes once linked to the lobbyist. He will return the money received directly from Abramoff, said his spokeswoman, Rebecca Rudman.

Jim Specht, a spokesman for Rep. Jerry Lewis, R-Redlands, said Lewis hadn't decided what to do with Abramoff-connected donations. Lewis received \$10,000 from tribes represented by the lobbyist, the report found, including the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe and the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

"He's still tracking down exactly how much was donated," Specht said. "The nearest we can determine it's all Indian tribe money. Once he figures that out, he will determine what he will do with the money."

Doolittle's office did not immediately return phone messages Wednesday evening.

Lee Blalack, a Washington, D.C., attorney for former Rep. Randy "Duke" Cunningham, did not return calls about \$12,500 in donations the lawmaker received from tribes represented by Abramoff. Cunningham, who represented the San Diego area, resigned from the House after pleading guilty in November to charges of corruption and tax evasion for taking \$2.4 million in bribes.

Abramoff has agreed to tell the FBI about alleged bribes to lawmakers and their aides on issues ranging from Internet gambling to wireless phone service in the House. The full extent of the investigation is not yet known.

Associated Press Writers Steve Lawrence and Juliet Williams in Sacramento and Gillian Flaccus in Orange County contributed to this report.

12/30/2005

BIA to hold 2 land-into-trust hearings

By ANDREW BROWN , Dispatch Staff Writer

ONEIDA - The residents of Madison and Oneida counties will soon get the chance to tell the Bureau of Indian Affairs what they think about the Oneida Indian Nation's land into trust application.

In a legal notice published on Dec. 23, the BIA announced it will hold two "public scoping meetings," one in each of the two counties. The Oneida County meeting will be held on Jan. 10 at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill High School in Verona, and the Madison County meeting will be held at Oneida High School in Oneida on Jan. 11. Both meetings will start at 6:30 p.m.

Citizens of the counties will be able to address BIA representatives, and the organization will use their comments to create an environmental impact statement that will aid them in their consideration of the land trust application.

"The EIS will analyze all pertinent environmental, social and economic attributes of the affected environment and potential consequences of taking the lands into trust," the BIA writes in the legal notice.

Earlier this year the Nation applied to have 17,370 acres of its land taken into trust with the Department of the Interior. The land has been broken up into three different groups, and local governments have a deadline to present a response for each group. The deadline for the first parcel of land, which is all located in Oneida County, was Dec. 27, while the deadlines for the other two are in late January and early March.

The land in the application covers a variety of different types of property including Turning Stone Resort and Casino, gas stations, agricultural land and undeveloped plots, among others. If accepted, the land will no longer be subject to local taxes and regulations.

Russell Lura, assistant to the chairman of the Madison County Board of Supervisors, said there will be a representative from the BIA at both places to run the meetings. Someone will take names at the door of the people who want to speak at the meeting. Those people will be given three minutes to address the BIA representatives, and then there will be extra time at the end for people to make additional comments.

Those who do not want to speak may still submit written comments by mailing, faxing or carrying written comments to the office of the regional director of the BIA in Nashville, Tenn.

Lura said the BIA has not specified to the county what type of comments it is looking for, and the legal notice is unclear on the issue.

"As we read it, it is pretty wide open," Lura said. "It sounds like people could speak about anything."

Topics could include any environmental concerns, but also issues that deal with cultural or economic subjects.

* The Oneida County meeting will be held on Jan. 10, at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill High School at 5275 State

Route 31 in Verona. The meeting will start at 6:30 p.m.

* The Madison County meeting will be held at Oneida High School at 560 Seneca St. in Oneida on Jan. 11. It will start at 6:30 p.m.

* Written comments should be mailed, faxed or hand delivered to Mr. Franklin Keel, Regional Director, Eastern Regional Office, Bureau of Indian Affairs. The address is 545 Marriott Drive, Suite 700, Nashville, Tenn., 37214. The fax number is 615-564-6701. All submissions should include name, return address and a caption on the first page of the comments, reading: DEIS Scoping Comments, Oneida Indian Nation of New York Trust Acquisition Project.

* For more information call Kurt G. Chandler at 615-564-6832 or visit www.oneidanationtrust.net

* Information is also available at the Oneida Indian Nation Annex Building at 579A Main Street in Oneida, Oneida City Hall at 109 North Main St. in Oneida, and Verona Town Hall at 6600 Germany Road in Durhamville.