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Two Decades of ‘Indian Gaming’ in the United States: What a Story!

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Abstract:

In this Plenary Keynote, two of the United States’ leading experts on “Indian gaming” team up to provide an informative, engaging, and entertaining account of a story that is not to be missed. Today, tribal gaming is a \$26.5 billion industry in the United States, with over 425 casinos owned and operated by 225 American Indian tribes in 28 states. The timing of North American Studies Conference follows not long on the heels of the 20th anniversary of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act of 1988 (IGRA), the federal law that established the legal and regulatory framework for tribal gaming. Anniversaries of landmarks in American law and policy provide an opportunity to assess their impacts. IGRA articulated two main policy goals: to promote tribal sovereignty and economic development through gaming, and to adequately regulate that gaming. There is no doubt that the Indian gaming industry has changed dramatically since IGRA was enacted, proliferating from a small number of makeshift bingo halls to a full range of casinos that include Las Vegas-style resorts. But how well has IGRA accomplished what Congress intended—or what tribes want and need? In the Plenary Keynote, the Co-Directors of the Institute for the Study of Tribal Gaming Law and Policy at the University of North Dakota and authors of the *Indian Gaming Now* blog (indiangamingnow.com) track two decades of Indian gaming against IGRA’s policy goals. Emphasizing Indian gaming’s impacts on American Indian communities, they explain the effects of three significant legal and political developments under IGRA: the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision in *Seminole Tribe v. Florida*, which tilted IGRA’s legal and political balance in favor of states, the rise of tribal-state revenue-sharing agreements, and controversies over “off-reservation gaming.” The speakers demonstrate that IGRA has had both intended and unintended legal, political, and policy consequences for American Indian as well as non-Indian populations and governments. Spanning many academic disciplines, the story of Indian gaming—how it began, where it is now, and what are the key issues that will shape its future—will surprise and fascinate you.