



CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF IGRA

Key Milestones Leading to this Legislation

1940s	Modern commercial gambling started in Las Vegas and in Indian Country. Las Vegas gaming flourished, but the federal government denied Indian gaming tribes equal access to lucrative gaming markets that any state could lawfully exercise.
1950s	Section 5 of the Johnson Act prohibited the transportation, sale, repair, possession and use of gambling devices in Indian country. The Act was limited to “gambling devices”; but as amended, had a very broad definition, and because of it, twenty years later, many Indian gaming proposals began with bingo.
1970s	Bingo parlors and card parlors opened. They did not compete with Las Vegas or Atlantic City. States opposed high stakes bingo.
1981	Seminole Tribe v. Butterworth launched the early “Bingo Wars”. Courts upheld the federal power to regulate Indian gaming. At the state level, the courts refused to permit states to enforce gaming laws in Indian country.
1987	California v. Cabazon Band decision by the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the right of tribes as sovereign nations to conduct gaming on Indian lands free of state control when similar gaming is permitted by the state outside the reservation for any purpose.
1984-1987	Congress considered many bills involving Indian gaming, but no legislation passed.
1988	Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) passed in September, 1988, and was signed into law Oct. 17, 1988. IGRA recognized the right of tribes to conduct similar gaming on tribal land in states where such gaming is permitted outside the reservation for any other purpose. IGRA further stipulated that a state is obligated to negotiate compacts that lay out the conditions, regulations and limitations for Class II gaming operations. If a state refuses to negotiate in good faith, tribes can sue in federal court to force mediation. If a state refuses to implement a mediator’s recommendations, the Secretary of the Interior establishes the procedures for Class III gaming within the state.

Sources for information: Arizona State University and National Indian Gaming Association