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Oropeza drops Gabrielino bill after casino letter surfaces

By [Malcolm Maclachlan](#) (published Thursday, February 07, 2008)

Sen. Jenny Oropeza, D-Long Beach, is dropping her authorship of a bill to create a state-recognized reservation for the Gabrielino Tribe after a letter surfaced saying the tribe would use the land to pursue a casino.

"I introduced this bill with the best of intentions," Oropeza said in a statement. "It was my understanding that the focus of this bill was about tribal recognition and a potential reservation site. As a result of a recent letter from the tribe, however, it is clear the sponsor and I are not on the same page."

SB1 explicitly carried no gaming rights. When Capitol Weekly first reported the story in December, Oropeza said she was carrying the bill to ensure "fairness" to a tribe that had been repeatedly mistreated and had long been frustrated in its efforts to gain federal recognition.

However, in a Jan. 11 letter from the tribal council, members were told the bill represents "Step 1" in the tribe's effort to get a casino: "The bill would establish the Gabrielino State Indian Reservation, but 'without gaming.' Thus, it is Step 1 in a 'Step 1, Step 2' approach. At a later date, after the reservation has been established, we will return to seek separate approval for gaming rights."

NEWS UPDATE

In the minute it takes you to read today's Capitol Roundup, one of these two pets will be killed in a local California animal shelter because of pet overbreeding and overpopulation.

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The Gabrielino-Tongva Tribe, or GT Tribe, has been in the news in recent years due to its efforts to get a casino in Southern California, along with a series of membership and leadership fights. It is one of two major factions claiming to be the real tribe. The group on whose behalf Oropeza is carrying the bill remains affiliated with longtime tribal attorney Jonathan Stein.

Another faction, the Gabrielino/Tongva Nation, or GT Nation, split with Stein in September 2006 in a dispute

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involving tribal assets. The groups have pending lawsuits against each other. SB1 states that all Gabrielinos would be allowed to live on the reservation, no matter which group they are currently affiliated with.

The bill listed four co-authors, all Democrats, according to the letter: Sens. Leland Yee of San Mateo and Jack Scott of Pasadena, and Assemblymembers Mike Davis of Los Angeles and Betty Karnette of Long Beach. Representatives from all four offices indicated they had no plans to revive the bill.

"I signed on to this bill in an effort to help a Native American tribe in my area," Scott said in a statement. "It seems now that we have been misled in this matter. I have consistently opposed increasing gambling in the state."

The council letter also advised members to vote against the four amended gaming compacts, Propositions 94-97. One of the tribes seeking new slot machines, Agua Caliente, has sought to lock the Gabrielinos out of the Southern California gaming market with an exclusivity clause, the letter claims. Nancy Conrad, a spokeswoman for Agua Caliente, said her tribe has done nothing to deny a reservation or a casino to the Gabrielinos.

"If the compacts go down, the vote shows that our political enemies—Agua Caliente and the other Indian casinos in Riverside and San Bernardino counties—can spend \$55 million and still lose," the letter states.

It also advised members to give thumbs down to Proposition 93, the measure to relax term limits supported by the current Democratic Legislative leaders, Speaker Fabian Núñez, D-Los Angeles, and Senate President Pro Tem Don Perata, D-Oakland.

Neither "have been good friends to the tribe," the letter notes, adding, "We can do better with new leadership."

Lobbyist Marc Aprea, who represents the GT Tribe, was contacted for this story but had not commented as of press time. David Quintana, a spokesman for both the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians and the California Tribal Business Alliance, said he has long been a critic of state recognition.

"It makes a mockery of the federal status of tribes," Quintana said. "What's next, county reservations? Is Yuba City going to authorize a reservation?"

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