

**Gay Kingman-Wapato:** My name is Arloween Gay Kingman-Wapato. [chuckles] And my current title is I'm executive director of the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association.

**Interviewer:** Alright, how long have you been doing that?

**Gay:** 20 years. After I finished with the National Indian Gaming Association, my husband and I moved home to Rapid City. And the tribes immediately asked us to start a regional organization. So we have 16 tribes in the state of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Nebraska. And that comprises the Great Plains Region or Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association. And Tim was with me until 2009, and then he passed away. So I've continued on since.

**Interviewer:** So we are here today talking about Lucy Covington. I have just heard amazing stories about this woman and that's been such a thrill to be able to be part of this. Can you tell me a little bit about what you remember about Lucy?

**Gay:** Oh, mostly through my husband, Tim Wapato who's Colville member, the Colville Confederated Tribes. And he called her auntie. Then his uncle was Paschal Sherman who was related also. And back then, of course, termination is, just strikes the fear in any tribe. And that was during the termination era, but she stood up to it. Of course, the story always is that there was no money to go to Washington DC, you know, every time, so she sold a cow to fly to Washington, DC and talk to congressional people about termination and not to let it happen.

And that's a well-known story, but it shows the kind of person she was, you know grit and determination and to save our nations, our tribal nations no matter what.

**Interviewer:** That was one of the first stories that Mel had told me when I first met Mel. Can you talk like in the early years when you guys first started working, what do you remember? What were some of the highlights?

**Gay:** Of NIGA?

**Interviewer:** Of Lucy [unintelligible 00:02:57]

**Gay:** You know what, all I know is mostly what has been told to me from Tim like that. I didn't myself really work with her. She came before me in my stint in working congressional people. Because my first 25 years, I spent in education. I was my master's and doctorate at ASU, and then I worked as a superintendent and president of the college. So it wasn't until, I guess about, well, it was late '70s that I got involved in National Congress and all of that. So I might not have that much to give you on Lucy Covington.

**Interviewer:** What can you tell me about NIGA in the early days?

**Gay:** Rick Hill was chairman of the Oneida Nation, Wisconsin. And they were early going into gaming as was Shakopee. And so they were part of this movement, the start to get together on Indian gaming. And so Rick Hill said, "Well, we've got to do more, we've got to come together," and so he ran, he ran for chairman of NIGA. This was back in '91. And my husband, Tim Wapato and I were working for Sycuan. I had just left executive director of National Congress of American Indians.

And Tim had just left, it was a political appointee under daddy Bush, President Bush. And so the chairman of Sycuan, Danny Tucker was a good friend. When Rick called me and he said he was going to run for chairman of National Indian Gaming Association, I said, "Well have you ever thought of another running mate?" Because normally, you get a running mate may be from a whole another region.

He said, "No," he said, "I just know we need to develop the organization better." I said, "How about Danny Tucker, you know he was chairman of Sycuan?" He said, "I don't know him." I called Danny and I got him on the phone together and they hit it off. And so they ran, Rick ran as chairman and Danny ran as vice. And the slate was Rick Hill and Tucker too. Then we worked their campaign, Tim and I, and they won.

So immediately, Ricks held a board meeting to see what we could do because we had to hit the ground running and there was no time. We were really under fire, you know, and Indian gaming was on the verge of really being denied, totally denied. And so he held a board meeting and I have to get up and walk out a little bit. I came back in and Tim says, "They just hired you. They appointed you the director of public relations."

I said, "Oh my gosh." But I'd been brought up, "When the tribes ask you, you can't refuse." Then it was a few days later that they made the offer to my husband, Tim Wapato to be the first executive director because up to that point, they never really had a formal office or organization. So the board told us that we had to-- Our mission was to set up an office in Washington, DC, and to start taking on and combating some of these you know, rumors and misinformation, and all of this stuff happening because people didn't want Indian tribes to have gaming.

You have to think back on in that time, and that was 1992 when we took over. We started to do NIGA in Washington. And it was a whole different ball game. We didn't have cells to talk to tribes, all we had was faxes. Many nights we were up all night faxing to all of the tribes, you know information on what was happening and everything. And so that was 1992. We worked out of our townhouse in Washington, DC because we still had one there having worked there.

Everyone laughs because Tim's had a Lincoln town car, an old Lincoln town car, and the back of the trunk was used as the kind of office. We'd go places and here was all the material, and he'd handed it out to tribes. And so in 1993, while we had to take on Congressman Torricelli and Trump. Torricelli is the person who had introduced legislation to deny Indian gaming, and it was very crucial.

And so we alerted all the tribes and we started-- I devised a campaign called Trump versus Yachts. The reason was because we used-- you know when you have gaming like Trump had, it's personal. All the money proceeds go to him. But Indian gaming is governmental and it goes to the tribal government for whatever the tribe games it should go for, whether it be schools or you know, fix the roads or whatever.

That was the campaign I devised was tribe Yachts versus Schools. And many of the tribes had built schools just with proceeds from Indian gaming. And so we kept alerting the tribes and the tribes would write their congressional people and talk with them and say we don't want this Torricelli Bill. And then it came time for a hearing and George Miller was the chair of the House Resources Committee. And he was from California, Congressman George Miller. And so it came time for the hearing and Marjorie Anderson was the chair of the Molax band of Ojibwe Indians. They had built a school totally on gaming revenues. So she came in and brought some of the children and they sat in the front row of the hearing.

I had a big blown-up picture of the school and then next to it I had the Trump yacht. And so as we sat there in the hearing and Tim testified in support of gaming and that the mafia wasn't involved and that we were setting up our own gaming commissions. Each tribe had their commission and the commission was a regulatory body on gaming and so you know we were well organized and everything was going. I was observing Donald Trump. And he had a politically correct testimony and he was writing in the margins there when he didn't like something.

You could tell he was agitated. And finally, when it was time for Torricelli to speak about his bill, to deny gaming and why, Trump went up with him to speak, to testify.

He threw away his testimony. And he said, "Those Indians don't look like Indians to me," and he made a lot of racist comments you've probably heard. And George Miller was taken aback and he said, "What do you mean they don't look like Indians do to you?" He said, "Jews still look like Jews, or Blacks still look like Blacks."

He called him on it and Trump just let go. He just said some racist things. What I had done is I taped the whole hearing. So as soon as the hearing was over, I took that tape and I went immediately to the TV studio and I pulled out that excerpt of Trump in his tirade. And I took it and I think it was only three minutes. And so we got it up on satellite by the six o'clock news so it was all over the media. And then meanwhile, as soon as Torricelli and Trump had finished testifying, we had figured out that the press would follow Trump because they always do.

And sure enough, they followed him and he went down the back stairway and so they couldn't go that way. And so they turned around and here was Rick Hill, the chairman of NIGA, and Tim Wapato, the executive director standing by these posters, ready to answer questions. And so they got in all of the answers, the statements that needed to get in. And so that was-- we got our story out there and then it was up on satellite. And I

still have that tape we did. Tim Wapato had dumped the bill, the Donald Trump Protection Act.

That's what he called it and the name stuck. So everyone, instead of calling the bill for what it was, they called it the Protection Act. To make a long story short, the bill died in committee and never even got out of committee so it never was voted on or anything. Just in committee, it died. And so Indian gaming was allowed to proceed and at that hearing, Senator McCain and Senator Inouye had come over and they testified on behalf of tribes, saying that this was sovereignty-- a sovereign right and they should have economic development, which was gaming.

After that, we had to implement The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act and it was hard because it depended on the state. Some states worked with the tribes and some states did not. They refused to sign a compact. And so some battles in each of the states had to happen. And so we'd go into the state and talk to the legislatures, and work with them and try to educate people that gaming was economic development. It brought in revenue for the tribe. And today I always say what we did is validated because when we see all of the gaming today and there's regulatory commissions, every tribe has one, plus there's the national Indian Gaming Regulatory Commission.

And they regulate it just like, you know, Las Vegas has a regulatory commission, then. And so it's-- today it's flourishing. It's multi-billion dollar economic boom for our tribes, but it was a hard fight. But I remember all of those tribal leaders. You know they just had tenacity because they knew. They could see the future and what it would do to help the tribe. They just never gave up.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

**Gay:** No, just that it's, you know, all of the hard work we put in is validated now, the gaming and the revenue coming into the tribes, plus the well-operated, the well-managed facilities that are there. Well-managed, the state-of-the-art as far as the security, and the surveillance, and all of that. Yes, and now we find out it's multi-billion dollar industry, so it's just phenomenal.

**Interviewer:** Yes. I did some research and I was curious to see that there were, I think, 427-foot tall casinos in the United States, but within US jurisdiction. Which I thought was interesting because if you think about that, that's a lot.

**Gay:** It is.

**Interviewer:** But then again, if you think about it, it's not really that many. On a big scale, 427 that's a lot but a lot of them are tribally owned. There are some that aren't, like in Vegas and Atlantic City and that kind of a few other places. But for the most part, there's a lot that are privately owned. If you do just averaging assets, it's like 10 per state or whatever. I know Washington, we have 29 tribes and not all of them have hotels, but that's just hotels casinos. That's not casinos. That's it.

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If you think, every other casino probably doesn't have a hotel, so that's probably more than 1,000 casinos out there that are tribally owned.

**Gay:** Then you have to consider too the spin-off jobs. The people that install the carpets or the people that do the cleanup. I know on Minnesota, you know it's spin-off because they've got bowling because you can go to the casino, but you can also go fishing and all of that. There's a lot of spin-off jobs, so it really has helped the economy. I just wished that more of our tribes had the market because now at South Dakota, our tribes are so isolated, in large there's really no market. You might have the best gaming facility, but there's no population to use it but like Spokane, it's a good market. There's money to be made.

**Interviewer:** I think that pretty much what I need.

**[00:19:38] [END OF AUDIO]**