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## Oropeza introduces bill for Gabrielino reservation

By [Malcolm Maclachlan](#) (published Thursday, December 13, 2007)

Senator Jenny Oropeza, D-Long Beach, has submitted a bill to create a state-administered reservation for the Gabrielino-Tongva tribe.

The tribe has been in the news in recent years because of a bitter split between two major factions. Each claims to be the real tribe, with the majority of members. Oropeza's bill is carried on behalf of one faction but makes no distinction and does not endorse either side.

Though Gabrielino factions have sought a casino in the past, Oropeza's bill explicitly grants no gaming rights. This hasn't stopped vocal opposition from representatives of other tribal organizations — and from a rival faction of the tribe not involved in the bill.

The bill "would establish a state-recognized Indian reservation" for the Gabrielino tribe. It acknowledges that the tribe lacks federal recognition, but states that experts on Indian history have shown the tribe has a past in the Los Angeles basin dating back 2,500 years. All Gabrielinos would be eligible to live on the reservation, no matter which faction they were associated with.

Since the tribe does not currently have the land for the reservation, the bill states that it would need to purchase the land and turn it over to the state. It would be administered by the state Department of Parks and Recreation, mimicking an arrangement already used in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York and Virginia. Representatives from Oropeza's office said they have started talking to the DPR about how the arrangement might work.

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"The tribe has tried for decades to receive federal recognition with little result," Oropeza said. "This would establish a process that would allow these tribal members to have a place to call home through state recognition."

However, the leaders of one of the two largest factions said they are not on board

with Oropeza's bill.

"Any attempt to do this in our name we will resist," said Martin Alcala, vice chair of the Gabrielino/Tongva Tribal

Council.

Oropeza is carrying the bill on behalf of a separate faction, the Gabrielino-Tongva Tribal Council. The group is represented by lobbyist Marc Aprea, who approached Oropeza. Oropeza said one of her conditions was that the bill contained no gaming provisions. Aprea was contacted but opted not to comment for this story.

Oropeza sought co-sponsors in an Oct. 23 letter, stating that the tribe's efforts to get federal recognition "have been ignored by the federal government." According to the preprint version of the bill released last Thursday, Senators Jack Scott, D-Pasadena, and Leland Yee, D-San Francisco, have signed on as authors. Assembly co-authors are Mike Davis, D-Los Angeles; Betty Karnette, D-Long Beach; and Nicole Parra, D-Hanford.

Alcala said members from his group would be fighting more publicly against the bill, but they "don't expect it to go anywhere." The group working with Aprea is allied with attorney Jonathan Stein, who represented the tribe for about five years as it sought both federal recognition and a casino. This relationship fell apart in a dispute that came to a head in September 2006. Now Stein works with a different tribal leadership group, while the old tribal leadership now works with former state Sen. Richard Polanco. The sides have accused each other of theft and fraud, and have pending legal cases against each other.

In an information sheet he prepared to help promote the bill, Aprea said the group he represents has 1,350 members, with around 300 allied with Alcala and the original leadership group chaired by Virginia Carmelo. Alcala said his group had 2,000 members while the other main faction had only about 100. The Carmelo/Alcala-led tribe will be holding a membership meeting on Dec. 15.

Oropeza said her bill is meant only to address historic wrongs; it would be up to the tribe to figure out its leadership issues. The Gabrielinos have had a difficult history, even by the standards of American Indians. Many feel they were robbed of federal recognition as one of the 18 "lost tribes" whose original treaties were found in 1905 but never ratified, even after decades of litigation.

"This measure is about fairness, and that's why I care," Oropeza said. "This bill attempts to correct past wrongs and give this Southland tribe state recognition."

The bill is also certain to be opposed by many established tribes, especially those who already have casinos in Southern California.

David Quintana, a spokesman for the Viejas tribe and the California Tribal Business Alliance, called the proposal "nutty," adding that it circumvents the normal federal recognition process and allows tribes who simply don't like the results they've gotten to push through special legislation.

"Can you imagine the tribes lining up?" Quintana said. "This bill does not have any gaming rights, but they can use this to get leverage with the feds."

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