

# PRESS RELEASE

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## 700-MILE SPIRIT RUN BY QUECHAN TRIBE BESEECHES GOVERNOR TO SIGN INDIAN SACRED SITES BILL; NEW POLL REPORTS CALIFORNIA VOTERS OVERWHELMINGLY SUPPORT BILL

*Sacramento, California, September 18* – Two dozen members of the Quechan Indian Nation will begin a 700-mile “spirit run” Friday from Sacramento to their Imperial Valley reservation to urge Governor Gray Davis to sign legislation to protect Indian sacred sites in California.

The tribal members will begin the grueling relay run on the steps of the state capitol Friday at dawn after prayers and ceremonies that reflect preparations for vision quests traditionally held by the Quechan people at a sacred site in Imperial County where a Canadian company wants to dig a massive open pit gold mine.

SB 1828 (Burton/Chesbro), passed last month by the California state legislature, would establish state protection of such tribal sacred sites in California.

“Presently no state or federal laws specifically protect tribal sacred sites,” said Senate President pro Tem John Burton, author of the bill. “This law establishes a process by which economic development interests and tribal governments can work together.”

Meanwhile, a statewide poll of likely voters released today by Senator Burton shows that more than 62 percent of California voters endorse the legislation.

Likely November voters were asked if they would support a law requiring mining or other development proposals on or near a sacred Indian site to comply with all the regulations and provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act. Notable in the poll was the fact that 74 percent of voters supporting Davis’ re-election were in favor of the bill.

“The public understands that this is a question of religious freedom,” noted Assemblyman Bill Leonard (R-Rancho Cucamonga). “Government has taken many hostile steps against religion, and this is one step that recognizes the importance of religion – in this case in the lives of a particular group of Americans.”

The Quechan Indian Tribe has been fighting for years to protect ancient sacred sites threatened by the proposed Glamis Imperial Mine, a 21/2 square mile, cyanide heap-leach goldmine at Indian Pass, an area revered by the Quechan people and other Colorado River tribes and used for thousands of years for spiritual teaching and religious pilgrimages.

Quechan Tribal Councilman Phil Emerson, who is organizing the run, is deeply passionate about this issue.

“Our sacred sites are more precious than gold. Tribal sacred settings in many cases are centuries old and at the heart of tribal cultures and traditions,” said Emerson. “Losing the ability

to protect these lands would be a devastating blow to every tribe in California. By signing SB 1828 into law, Governor Davis will be ensuring that these lands will be protected for our children, grandchildren and generations to come.”

(The Quechan Indian Nation is a federally-recognized tribe. About 3,000 tribal members live on the 45,000-acre reservation, and many still speak their native language. The aboriginal lands include the mine site, which is on Bureau of Land Management lands not included in their reservation.)

Legislative advocates emphasize that SB 1828 will create a fair process. Under the law, an agency considering permits for a development project would hire a neutral, third party investigator to assess a sacred site’s status. This assessment would be under the same environmental requirements now provided for all development projects under state environmental law.

“Under this law, a tribe cannot simply claim that a site is sacred,” said Morongo tribal vice chair Luanne Martin. “There must be evidence and that evidence would be independently evaluated. According to the Native American Heritage Commission, there are not many of these sites left, and the state should take every measure to preserve these precious cultural resources.”

Commenting on the poll, Burton said, “This bill is supported by every ideology, minority grouping, income group, voting status, age and household party type, indicating how deeply Californians feel about helping Native Americans preserve and protect their cultural heritage”

A broad coalition of labor, environmental and cultural groups support the legislation now on Governor Davis’ desk for signature, including the Sierra Club California, the Trust for Public Land, California League of Conservation Voters, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO, the Natural Resources Defense Council, the California Preservation Foundation, the San Diego County Water Agency, the Environmental Science Institute and more than 50 California Indian tribes.

***FOR MORE INFORMATION OR INTERVIEWS CONTACT: Phil Emerson (Cell 928-920-0619)  
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**INDEPENDENT GROUPS SUPPORTING BILL**

ADRO Environmental Inc.  
Alliance of California Tribes  
Association of American Indian Affairs  
Butte Environmental Council  
California Catholic Conference  
California Indian Basketweavers Association  
California League of Conservation Voters  
California Nations Indian Gaming Association  
California Preservation Foundation  
California Rural Indian Health Board, Inc.  
Community Water Rights Project  
Environmental Justice Coalition for Water  
Environmental Science Institute  
Friends of the River  
Latino Issues Form

Mariposa, Amador, Calaveras, Tuolumne Health Board Inc.  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Natural Resources Defense Council  
Pacific Institute for Studies in Development, Environment, & Security  
Sacred Land Film Project of Earth Island Institute  
San Diego BayKeepers  
San Diego County Water Agency  
Sierra Club California  
Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition  
SLO Coast Alliance  
The Oaks Farms – Joan Irvine Smith  
Trust for Public Land  
Tsurai Ancestral Council  
United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO  
Urban Creeks Council of California

**TRIBES SUPPORTING THE BILL**

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians  
Auburn Rancheria  
Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley  
Big Sandy Rancheria  
Bishop Tribal Council  
Blue Lake Rancheria  
Bridgeport Indian Reservation  
Cabazon Band of Mission Indians  
Cahto Tribe of Laytonville Rancheria  
Campo Band of Mission Indians  
Cedarville Rancheria  
Chemehuevi Indian Tribe  
Concow Maidu Tribe  
Cortina Rancheria  
Coyote Valley Tribal Council  
Cuyapaipe Band of Mission Indians  
Dry Creek Rancheria Band of Pomo Indian Tribe  
Greenville Rancheria  
Jackson Rancheria  
Karuk Tribe of California  
Manzanita Band of Kumeyaay Nation  
Mesa Grande Band of Mission Indians  
Middletown Rancheria Band of Pomo and Lake Miwok Indians  
Mooretown Rancheria  
Morongo Band of Mission Indians  
Nor-Rel-Muk Nation  
Noyo River Indian Community  
Pajaro Valley Ohlone Indian Council  
Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians  
Potter Valley Tribe  
Quechan Indian Nation of Fort Yuma  
Ramona Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians  
Redding Rancheria  
Resignini Rancheria  
Robinson Rancheria Band Pomo Indians Tribe  
Rumsey Indian Rancheria  
San Luis Obispo County Chumash Council  
San Manuel Band of Serrano Missions Indians  
Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Tribe  
Santa Ynez Band of Mission Indians

Sherwood Valley Rancheria  
Smith River Rancheria  
Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians  
Susanville Indian Rancheria Tribe  
Sycuan Band of Kumeyaay Indians  
Table Bluff Reservation – Wiyot Tribe  
Timbisha Shoshone Tribe  
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians  
Washoe Tribe of Nevada & California