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Miwok representative cleared of allegations

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Published 12:00 a.m. PT July 1, 2004 | Updated 12:49 a.m. PT Jan. 9, 2011

SACRAMENTO -- The Interior Department's

inspector general has cleared a regional Bureau of Indian Affairs official of allegations that she used her authority to influence matters in her own tribe as it was seeking approval to build a \$100 million casino.

Deputy Regional Director Amy Dutschke,

a member of the Ione Band of Miwok Indians, did not violate any rule, law or ethical standard, Inspector General Earl Devaney concluded.

In a three-page letter dated June

16, Devaney said he found no evidence that Dutschke took any official action regarding the tribe or advanced the interests of her family in the tribe.

A phone message left for Dutschke

was not immediately returned Wednesday evening, but tribal Chairman Matt Franklin said: "There was never a doubt that we wouldn't pass."

The investigation followed calls

by Congress to investigate alleged conflicts of interest aired in an article by The Associated Press.

In February, the AP -- relying on

BIA and tribal documents -- reported that the tribe's official membership grew from about 70 to 535 after regional Bureau of Indian Affairs officials opened up membership rolls in 1996 to other Indians in the area. The new members included Dutschke and 68 of her relatives, two of whom also worked for the BIA, the article said.

The AP reported that Dutschke was the BIA's acting regional director in June 2002 when she authorized the Ione Band's last leadership election. The election produced five new tribal leaders, four of whom are related to Dutschke, the article said.

Tribal members are split between the federally recognized leadership, which proposed the casino, and a smaller group that claims it was ousted by Dutschke and other BIA officials.

The minority group's complaints have been echoed by congressmen and county supervisors, leading to a separate, ongoing FBI investigation.

The inspector general confirmed that Dutschke's uncle and niece are BIA employees and tribal members but said she did not have 68 relatives in the tribe.

Devaney's letter to U.S. Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., who called for the investigation, also said Dutschke recused herself in March 2001 from matters related to the Miwok Band.

Devaney also said another BIA employee, Carol B. Rogers-Davis, who resigned her post as elections committee chairwoman

after some tribal members objected, has no "blood relatives" in the tribe. The article reported Rogers-Davis had three relatives in the tribe but did not specify whether they were related by marriage.

The tribe's new leadership has been given nearly \$2 million from a state trust fund and is aiming to build a \$100 million, 2,000-slot machine gaming hall in Plymouth, in the Sierra Nevada foothills. The casino would generate an estimated \$185 million a year and enrich enrolled members.

Tribal members are not the only ones divided over the casino issue in this fast-growing wine region. In May, Plymouth voters recalled the mayor and two City Council members who supported a pact with the tribe.