



UTE INDIAN TRIBE

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October 27, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
United States House of Representatives
123 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Opposition to Tribal Recognition Act of 2015 (H.R. 3764)

Dear Congressman Bishop:

The Ute Indian Tribe appreciates your interest and work in the area of federal recognition of Indian tribes. Recognition of Indian tribes, the first inhabitants of this great land, is one of the United State's most solemn and important obligations. Federal recognition establishes a special and unique government-to-government relationship between the Federal government and an Indian tribe, and creates significant legal rights, responsibilities and commitments.

Given the significance of Federal recognition decisions, the Tribe must oppose H.R. 3764. While we support Congressional oversight of the Department of the Interior to protect the integrity of the recognition process and to prevent a flood of new tribes from diminishing already scarce Indian affairs budgets, acts of Congress should not be the only or the primary way that the United States recognizes Indian tribes.

First, Federal recognition of Indian tribes should not be subject to Congressional politics. In some cases, partisan politics or a single U.S. Senator seeking to filibuster could prevent a deserving tribe from being recognized. In other cases, a politically powerful group could get recognized as an Indian tribe whether or not they have a history of being an Indian tribe.

Second, the bill provides no standards or requirements for Congress to follow in making decisions on Federal recognition. The bill requires the Secretary of the Interior to provide a report summarizing her view of petitions for Federal recognition, but the bill does not require Congress to consider the Secretary's views. Congress could even act on its own with or without a report from the Secretary.

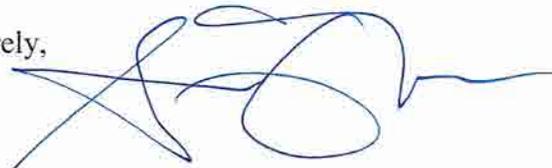
Third, Congress is not staffed or equipped to manage the recognition of Indian tribes. Under the current system, the Department of the Interior utilizes anthropological, genealogical, and historical research methods, to verify and evaluate petitions for Federal recognition.

Individual Members of Congress and Congressional Committee's lack the staff, resources and expertise to assess these petitions.

As Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee with its Subcommittee on Indian Insular and Alaska Native Affairs, and as our Congressional Representative, the Tribe requests that you consult with us and other tribes on matters involving Federal Indian law and policy. While there are some areas needing serious reform, for example, Indian energy development, there are other significant cornerstones of Federal Indian law that should be maintained, for example, government-to-government consultation, the Indian Reorganization Act and the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Working together and consulting on these important matters we can find common ground that honors the treaty and trust relationship upon which the United States was built.

Thank your for your consideration of our opposition to H.R. 3764. We look forward to working with you on this bill and other legislation to improve our future while honoring and maintaining our past. Please contact the Tribe's Business Committee to arrange future consultations on these matters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shaun Chapoose', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Shaun Chapoose, Chairman
Ute Tribal Business Committee