

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

May 14, 2014

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
Chairman  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings:

As co-chairs of the Congressional Native American Caucus we write to urge you to hold a hearing on H.R. 3313, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Mission Indians Land Transfer Act of 2013.

The legislation would place a 1,400-acre parcel in Santa Barbara County, which has already been determined by the Department of Interior to be part of the Tribe's ancestral lands and is currently owned in fee by the tribe, into federal trust status for housing purposes.

For more than three years, the Chumash Tribe has sought to engage in a government-to-government dialogue with Santa Barbara County to discuss mitigation measures to protect these aboriginal homelands while preserving the character of the surrounding community. Among other things, the tribe proposed payments-in-lieu-of-taxes, housing plans and densities that are consistent with surrounding developments, and even a limited waiver of sovereign immunity to achieve these goals. But instead of meeting the tribe at the negotiating table, on August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013 the County Board of Supervisors voted to reject government-to-government talks, thereby refusing to recognize the tribe's right to sit at that table.

Basing the decision in part on an argument that the tribe's sovereign status did not extend beyond the borders of its current reservation, the majority of the Council argued that the tribe should be treated as a private property owner. This misguided and legally indefensible notion is a threat to tribes everywhere, and should not be allowed to fester.

While we share the belief of many in Congress that local input is an important component of a successful fee-to-trust process, we simply cannot accept a system that subjugates tribal sovereignty in this way. Further, the decision by the member of Congress from this District to oppose a hearing on this bill until a local agreement is reached creates an untenable situation for the Tribe. We believe a fair and balanced hearing on H.R. 3313 will finally allow the tribe an opportunity to address concerns about its proposal, and move forward with its proposal to conduct responsible development on its aboriginal homelands.

Thank you for your consideration of our request, and we look forward to working with you to ensure that our tribal nations can thrive despite more than two centuries of injustice.

Sincerely,



Tom Cole  
Member of Congress



Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress