

Opinion re: Tribe Camp 4 Annexation Economic Impact and Tribe Responsibilities

**Enough is Enough is Enough.**

At what point does the Chumash tribal government say, “We have achieved financial independence?”

According to Tribal Chairman Armenta, it’s when the tribe says so. That isn’t the law, but then the tribe doesn’t play by the same rules as the rest of us.

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash has approached Rep. Elton Gallegly to initiate a federal legislative process on their behalf. They wish to unilaterally remove from the jurisdiction of Santa Barbara County, and the county tax rolls, the 1,400-acre “Camp 4” property at Highways 154 and 246.

This legislation would bypass local citizen concerns and land use processes, as well as the regulations of the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).

To put this power grab into perspective, those 1,400 acres are only 100 acres less than the size of Solvang, and 40 percent larger than Buellton.

If the tribe does transfer that property to their reservation, it could build a city with a population of 16,000 (the population of Carpinteria, which is only 100 acres more) if they wanted to, and never pay a cent of property taxes.

Imagine the impact that would have on the businesses and communities throughout the Valley. Free of local regulations, property and sales taxes, reservation businesses could undercut the prices of every competing business. Commercial property values could plummet. Tax revenues could fall.

To make matters worse, these new business entities wouldn’t contribute to Valley road and utility upkeep, or emergency services, or public schools with property taxes and impact fees like other businesses.

Just removing the land from the tax rolls would come at a significant cost to the county at a time it can ill afford to lose any revenue. Those missing revenues would directly affect public services and school systems.

The tribe’s tax responsibilities would be shifted onto the backs of others, again.

The economic distress of tribal communities during the Great Depression resulted in the creation of the existing fee-to-trust process in 1934, but it was predicated on “need,” which is clearly not the situation of the local tribe.

The law clearly states that the annexation privilege can be used only when it is necessary for a tribe to achieve economic stability.

With more than 250 million dollars in annual revenue and multiple large property holdings, the tribe enjoys substantial economic prosperity.

But now, Chairman Armenta claims the tribe will decide when enough is enough — perhaps after planning for unlimited future generations.

Valley residents are understandably shocked by this outrageous position.

Well, enough is enough is enough — now.

In October 2009, Santa Barbara County adopted the Santa Ynez Valley Community Plan, a planning document that guides development, assures the provision of services, and provides policy direction for the valley.

The plan reflects almost 10 years of research, \$2 million of public expenditure, and extensive hearings and citizen testimony. It is based in large part on the Valley Blueprint, a planning document created and signed in 2000 by local citizens of all political persuasions, including a Chumash tribal elder.

The tribe purchased the Camp 4 property subject to local taxation and regulations, including the Community Plan. Like their neighbors, they should work through the county land use process when considering development. In return, the tribe will share in the provision of public services provided by local jurisdictions.

That's fair. It's the deal we all live with.

The Chumash have achieved financial success because the voters of California, including those in the Santa Ynez Valley, voted them the opportunity to do so.

It's time for the Tribe to show respect for those same voters rather than abuse its financial advantage. Great financial independence brings with it great moral responsibilities.

Equally urgent, it is time for the tribe's neighbors to voice their concerns to each other and to their elected representatives.

We ignore the current annexation proposal at our own peril.