

AN OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESSWOMAN LOIS CAPPS

May 20, 2014

The Honorable Lois Capps
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Capps:

I am writing again to you regarding the continuing efforts of our Tribe to place 1,400 acres of our ancestral land into trust for the purpose of providing tribal government-supported housing for the members of our community and their families. While we appreciate your efforts to meet with the Tribe, your requirement that this issue be resolved at the local level is becoming every day more of a pretext for opposition to Tribal self-determination and adequate housing for Santa Ynez Chumash Tribal members and their descendants.

Your adherence to the position of a local solution would be understandable if there existed the basis of a government-to-government relationship between our Tribal government and the County of Santa Barbara. As you know, the County has refused to even acknowledge our standing as a government by voting to reject any efforts to formally negotiate with the tribe. By supporting the County, you are supporting the position that Tribes are not governments worthy of a government-to-government relationship.

As you are well aware, the default position that you embrace would afford the County absolute veto authority over any efforts the Tribe would pursue in promotion of Tribal government policies in our area. Your inability to recognize this basic element of Tribal governmental sovereignty is deeply disappointing to those of us who have watched you champion protections that the Constitution extends to all other groups within America. Tribal sovereignty cannot be a theoretical concept used when convenient. It is the only protection our government has been afforded since the creation of the U.S. government.

You have mentioned many times that you would like to do whatever you can to help with this situation. Yet ideas that we have presented for your consideration have repeatedly been rejected (e.g., having your office broker a high-level meeting between the governments, adding a binding arbitration provision in HR 3313, supporting a Congressional hearing in a neutral forum that would fully explore the concessions offered in our proposal to the county).

Our goal remains the same – to take our ancestral lands into trust for the purpose of providing housing for our members. Ultimately, we are confident we will achieve this goal. The time and expense it will take to reclaim these lands, the impact on the lives of our members and their families, and the day we will see the necessary leadership that brings an end to the local divisiveness are the only variables.

Sincerely,

Vincent Armenta
Tribal Chairman
Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians

