



Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomí Indians GUN LAKE TRIBE

David K. Sprague
Tribal Chairman

Federally Acknowledged
August 23, 1999

Service Area: Allegan Barry
Kalamazoo Kent and
Ottawa Counties

STATEMENT OF TRIBAL CHAIRMAN DAVID K. SPRAGUE

Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomí Indians (Gun Lake Tribe)

Before the House Subcommittee on Native American and Alaskan Affairs

Legislative Hearing on S. 1603

July 15, 2014

Chairman Young, Ranking Member Hanabusa, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is DK Sprague and I am the Chairman of the Match-E-Be-Nash-She-Wish Band of Pottawatomí Indians of Michigan. We are also known as the Gun Lake Tribe.

I want to thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 1603, a bill that will simply re-affirm the trust status of our lands. I also want to thank Senators Stabenow and Levin, who introduced this bill -- and our own Congressman Fred Upton, whose district encompasses our reservation and who is also a strong supporter of this bill.

We were pleased that this legislation recently passed the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and the full United States Senate by unanimous vote.

Mr. Chairman, this legislation is very straight-forward. It simply re-affirms the trust status of the one parcel of land the Federal Government currently holds in trust for our Tribe.

Our Tribe's sovereign status was reaffirmed by the United States on August 23, 1999. In 2001, we petitioned the Secretary of Interior to take 147 acres of land into trust on behalf of our Tribe.

After several years of a long and costly administrative process -- and many more years of litigation, these lands were finally placed into trust on January 30, 2009 -- nearly eight years after we first petitioned to have these lands taken into trust.

We have since opened a gaming and entertainment facility on our reservation lands. They are also the same lands where we house our Tribal police department. Again, this is the only parcel of land that is held in trust on behalf of our Tribe.

Since February of 2011, we have hired over 1,000 people in our community. We have worked closely with our local governmental partners on a revenue sharing plan that has greatly benefitted

our Tribe, local schools, law enforcement agencies and local communities.

All of this is now threatened by a U.S. Supreme Court opinion that has allowed one individual to challenge the authority of the Secretary of Interior to take land into trust for our Tribe. This case threatens our economic well-being and has made it virtually impossible for my Tribe to obtain financing for any future economic development projects. After thirteen years of administrative and legal battles, we find ourselves still fighting the same battles in the courts. Our Tribe has suffered a great loss of resources from these lawsuits. And while we have won every single challenge on the merits – it is now time for this dispute to come to an end -- for the sake of our Tribe, our employees and our local communities.

Mr. Chairman, let me be very clear -- this legislation will simply reaffirm the status of our existing trust lands—and it will only impact the Gun Lake Tribe. It does not affect any other lands, and it does not give my Tribe or the BIA any new authority.

It is my understanding that we are the only Tribe in the country that currently faces this dilemma. I would like to include in the record a letter from the BIA which underscores the uniqueness of our situation.

That is why this legislation is strongly supported on a bi-partisan basis by the Michigan Congressional delegation, the U.S. Department of Interior and our local community. Mr. Chairman, I would also like to make part of the record 35 letters of support from local elected officials, law enforcement, business leaders and civic groups who live in our community. It is important to note that not one unit of government – local, county or state – has ever opposed our efforts to re-establish our reservation or to operate a gaming facility on our homelands.

Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today. I urge the Committee to pass this bill as soon as possible and I am open to answer any question you may have.