

**Statement of
Testimony of Harrison Talgo
Member, San Carlos Apache Nation and resident of Bylas
before the
United States House of Representatives
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests & Public Lands
concerning
HR.1904, Southeast Arizona Land Exchange and Conservation Act of 2011**

June 14, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Harrison Talgo. I am a member of the San Carlos Apache Nation. I am a former Tribal chairman, and I served as a member of the San Carlos Apache Tribal Council for 16 years. This is National Flag Day and I am proud to say I am a veteran of the Marine Corps and served my country with honor and duty in Vietnam. I am also a Tribal Elder.

Many times I have come before Congress as an official representative of my government to present issues affecting and in the best interest of the San Carlos Apache Tribal Government. But today, I come before you as a concerned private citizen of Bylas.

I am here to voice my support of HR.1904.

My ancestral clan inhabited the Pinal Mountains in Arizona, the same region where many mining operations exist today and not far from the mining project proposed by Resolution Copper. My wife Elouise and I raised 7 children on the reservation. I understand the Apache way and am respectful of the traditions of my ancestors. They were proud and independent people.

I know the tribal leadership does not share my position. I have tried very hard to understand why they oppose this project when we are in such desperate need of jobs and industry. I believe that traditional Apache values are not mutually exclusive with economic development.

We are one of the poorest Indian tribes in the nation. Seven in ten eligible workers in the tribe are unemployed. Almost 80 percent of our people live in poverty. Alcoholism and drug use are rampant and suicide rates are high. The average Apache male has a life expectancy of 54 years, about 20 years shorter than the average American male.

Obviously, this places a tremendous strain on personal and family relationships and a heavy burden on social services – services the tribe struggles to provide.

Without jobs, our children are forced to move to neighboring communities or into the city to find work. Not many of them return. With each passing generation, a piece of Apache identity and culture is lost. I can tell you as a father and grandfather and one who grew up in traditional ways and learned the language of my fathers, that is heartbreaking.

Those who stay on the reservation face a bleak future. Only education and training and opportunities for good-paying jobs can improve that picture.

Even though our nearest reservation boundary is about 20 miles away from the Resolution project and our nearest community is almost 40 miles away by highway, that is a reasonable distance to travel for a job, especially when you consider the high wages and benefits that mining jobs provide. There also are opportunities for San Carlos residents to start businesses much closer to home that will supply and service a large mining operation like Resolution Copper. In discussions with Resolution, I have discovered the company is ready and willing to discuss these kinds of opportunities with San Carlos. Many Apaches worked at the former Magma Mine that is the base area for this new mine.

The issue today is not about our reservation land, our sovereignty, our heritage, our self respect – these are not for sale. This is about putting our people – a lot of people – to work. I believe economic development should be our leadership's top priority. I have previously testified before Congress in support of economic development projects. I have done so in the face of opposition from other leaders who have opposed these same opportunities on and near the reservation. Some of those projects experienced costly delays as a result of the Council's opposition, but they all were built eventually. And they have all hired Apaches.

I respect the Council's desire to protect sites that have cultural or historical significance. I want that, too. But Oak Flat is a long way from us, and I believe strongly that it is possible for our traditional values to co-exist with economic progress. In fact, I don't believe one can survive without the other. Economic progress and prosperity leads to a better standard of living, better health, better services and better education. It increases our capacity to learn and expands our cultural horizons. It gives us additional resources to explore and study our past, to protect what we hold sacred, to showcase and display those things that are culturally important, and to help the outside world better understand and appreciate the stories and traditions of our fathers.

Because many members of the San Carlos Apache Nation are dependent on the tribal government for food, utilities, and a limited number of available jobs, they often do not speak out against Council decisions in fear of losing those benefits. I am not afraid to speak out. I can assure you I do not stand alone as a member of the San Carlos Apache Nation in support of the Resolution Copper Mine and the jobs and prosperity it will create. I made personal phone calls to many people within my community of 2,000 tribal members and the majority of them responded in favor of this project.

I respectfully urge Congress to pass this bill. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I welcome any questions you and the committee may have.

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