

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Karuk Tribe

For Immediate Release: May 2, 2018

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OVER 70 TRIBES PRESS LaMALFA FOR ANSWERS

***LaMalfa's Bill to Create New Tribe in Siskiyou County Shrouded in Secrecy;
Leaves Commercial Salmon Industry Concerned***

Happy Camp, CA— Rep. Doug LaMalfa (R-Richvale) recently introduced a controversial bill to restore a terminated Indian Rancheria which would be handed over to a group of California Natives that have so far failed to demonstrate a lineal connection to it. The bill would re-establish the Ruffey Rancheria, terminated by Congress in 1958, re-write Ruffey's enrollment criteria from 1905, and allow the new group to claim unlimited reservation lands anywhere in Siskiyou County bypassing the administrative process other tribes must face. On these lands they could place casinos, stake water claims, and impact fishing rights of other Tribes and commercial fishermen.

Karuk and other area tribes have contacted Congressman LaMalfa more than a dozen times in four months asking for more information.. “So far, the concerns that have been raised by area Tribes that would have their rights and resources impacted have not been adequately addressed by Congressman LaMalfa,” says Karuk Chairman Russell ‘Buster’ Attebery. “Why the rush, and why so much secrecy?” asks Attebery.

Concerns over the bill are spreading throughout California’s Indian Country. In recent days the Southern California Tribal Chairmen’s Association (SCTCA), the Northern California Tribal Chairmen’s Association (NCTCA) and the California Nations Indian Gaming Association (CNIGA) have all written LaMalfa and members of the House Subcommittee on Indian, Insular, and Alaska Native Affairs urging a re-hearing on the bill to get answers. Together these groups represent 70 federally recognized tribes from all over California.

“We are concerned to learn that several tribal commenters in California and Oregon have raised questions about the group affiliated with HR 3535 that have gone unanswered,” wrote Southern California Tribal Chairman’s Associated (SCTCA) Robert Smith.

In referring to questions raised by the Karuk Tribe and others, Northern California Tribal Chairman’s Association Chair Garth Sundberg wrote, “These questions go beyond the bill’s text and address a range of critical issues such as whether the group are the lineal descendants of the final distributes [of the terminated Ruffey Rancheria] and...concerns regarding the group’s self-disclosed interests in the trust land of their neighbors.”

This outpouring of concern has led the Ranking Members of the House Committee on Natural Resources and Subcommittee on Indian Affairs to call on LaMalfa to hold a rehearing on the bill. In a recent letter to

Chairman Rob Bishop, Representatives Jared Huffman, Raul Grijalva and Norma Torres wrote that “the questions that have been raised by these letters speak to fundamental issues that impact the rights and resources of many diverse interests....[,] a second hearing would address these important issues, and would ensure that tribal restoration is a transparent, historically accurate, and accountable process.”

Although the original Ruffey Rancheria was on a small creek near the town of Etna, miles from the Klamath River, LaMalfa’s bill would allow them to establish reservation lands anywhere in Siskiyou County and exercise water and fishing rights, adding more chaos and confusion to long running debates between tribes, fishermen and area farmers. This concern led Noah Oppenheimer, Executive Director for the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations (PCFFA) to write Chairman Bishop, warning that suddenly granting a new tribal entity fishing rights on the Klamath River “might well disrupt and destabilize the current federal, state, and Tribal salmon allocation systems for the entire Klamath Basin and much of the west coast.”

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