



February 12, 2010

The Honorable Larry Echo Hawk
Assistant Secretary - Indian Affairs
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Letter from M. Taylor Montgomery dated February 8, 2010

Dear Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk:

The above-referenced letter sent to you on behalf of the Stop the Casino 101 Coalition, requesting that you "de-certify" Greg Sarris as Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (Tribe) and claiming that Chairman Sarris "possesses no Native American blood" is deeply offensive to the Tribe, as well as to Native American people. For too long, our Native people have struggled with our own identities as those in the dominant society have tried to deny or delegitimize the American Indian identity, experience, and history. Now, we find ourselves confronted by a group of residents who, without any understanding of us as Native people, have challenged the identity of our own Tribal Chairman and his personal history.

As you know, every Indian tribe has the exclusive right to determine its own membership. This group would have you ignore this bedrock principle of federal Indian law and remove our Chairman, who has served as the Tribe's democratically elected Chairman for the past 18 years. This grassroots organization has never formally or informally contacted my Tribe to share any of their concerns regarding Tribal issues. My Tribe and its members have been able and continue to document and trace our own genealogies for establishing who is an Indian and eligible for membership in our Tribe. We certainly do not need Stop the Casino to explain our identities for us or assume an antiquated paternalistic view of a local Tribe, inferring that we cannot determine our membership criteria and operate and establish ourselves with self governance that is fair, accurate, and equitable for our members, and further that we have made some error within our membership, as they claim, regarding our well respected Chairman Sarris.

While hardly deserving of a response, suffice it to say that the genealogy presented in the letter is deeply flawed. It omits critical facts, relies on an incomplete written record, and lacks the benefit of the oral traditions and knowledge that necessarily inform the personal histories of California Indians, many of whom hid their Indian identities from officials, and even from themselves out of a basic need for survival, after experiencing years of racism, abject poverty, and second-class citizenship.

Sadly, the paternalism and flawed analysis evidenced in the letter is consistent with Stop the Casino's long-standing efforts to distort the Tribe's historical record, discredit Chairman Sarris' academic credentials, misrepresent key facts, file frivolous lawsuits, and otherwise do anything within its power to delay our economic development project. Still, this most recent effort to undermine Chairman Sarris' status as Indian is not only deeply unsettling and insulting to every member of our Tribe but is disruptive and divisive to our positive relationship with our larger Native and non-native community.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lorelle W. B. Ross
Vice-Chair

cc: The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior
The Honorable Diane Feinstein, United States Senate
The Honorable Barbara Boxer, United States Senate
The Honorable Lynn Woolsey, U.S. House of Representatives
The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger, Governor of California
Ms. Andrea Lynn Hoch, Legal Affairs Secretary, Office of the Governor

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