

Representative Marilyn Strickland
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the U.S.
1:00 pm, September 14, 2022

Thank you, Chair Leger Fernandez, Acting Ranking Member Obernolte, and members of the subcommittee for allowing me to speak in support of H.R. 6964 at today's hearing.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the late Representative Don Young of Alaska, a champion for indigenous communities. I am thankful for his past leadership on this committee.

My bill is simple—it will amend the Long-Term Leasing Act to give the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation leasing authority for up to 99 years. This will allow the Tribe greater access to economic opportunity and strengthen their sovereignty.

As a freshman in Congress, it is my honor to represent the Chehalis in Washington's 10th Congressional district, and to work alongside their leadership.

I am pleased this committee has invited Chairman Harry Pickernell to speak on H.R. 6964 as well.

With a number of enterprises, the Chehalis are a strong community, but a 1955 law stands in the way of economic development.

The Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955 provides tribes the authority to enter into lease agreements terms of up to 25 years, with a potential renewal of an additional 25 years subject to the Interior Secretary's approval.

Since this law's enactment, however, the Act has been amended by Congress to give nearly 60 tribes expanded leasing authority.

While no tribe should be impeded by these leasing restrictions, this expanded authority is both essential and timely for the Chehalis Tribe.

Chehalis has trust land off of Interstate 5 and Highway 12 that could be vital for our economy, including warehouse structures and other investments that will strengthen our stretched supply chain.

In the current financing environment, the Tribe must provide leases of up to 99 years to potential lessees for these larger scale and needed projects.

That is why I've introduced H.R. 6964, and why the Chehalis need this expanded authority as soon as possible.

I am proud to have partnered with Senator Cantwell, Representatives Derek Kilmer, and Herrera Beutler on this measure.

As of today, every member of the Washington State Congressional Delegation is a cosponsor of this bill, and it has support from the Administration.

During a legislative hearing in the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Bryan Newland spoke in support of this language, and of tribal equity for the Chehalis.

And in a statement to this committee, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Garriott noted the Department's support, and the economic development opportunities this bill will facilitate.

This is a bipartisan issue, with federal support across our branches of government, and it is something we must get done.

I thank the members of the subcommittee, and I yield back.