

TESTIMONY OF LEWIS PITT, JR.
BEFORE THE GENERAL GOVERNMENT SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
IN SUPPORT OF HB 5016 AND POLICY OPTION PACKAGE FOR
LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON INDIAN SERVICES

April 21, 2021

Good afternoon, Co-chairs Golden and Smith and members of the General Government Subcommittee. My name is Lewis Pitt, Jr. and I am the Government Affairs and Planning Director of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 5016, especially for the Legislative Commission on Indian Services budget. The Warm Springs Tribes have worked with the Commission on Indian Services since its inception to build the government-to-government relationship between the Tribes and the State of Oregon.

The Commission started as a dream we shared with then-Senator Vic Atiyeh to stop resolving our differences through litigation and to treat each other as partners working for the good of our people, our shared resources, and our treasured land. Governor Atiyeh had realized that far too often state agencies were making decisions about issues of mutual state-tribal concern without communicating with their tribal counterparts. Knowing that the Warm Springs Tribes alone have Treaty Rights on over 10,000,000 acres of Oregon, Governor Atiyeh understood the wasteful nature of acting in isolation. Instead of working things out like partners, we would usually be standing in front of a judge talking about the failings of our sister government.

With the passage of Senate Bill 770 in 2001, the Commission took a leadership role in building the strongest government-to-government relationship in any state in our great country. The Legislative Assembly created a process for regular meetings of state and tribal personnel to foster cooperation in several major areas. Since then, there has been an annual state-tribal summit, and intergovernmental meetings on natural resources, education, cultural resources, economic development, health and human services, and public safety have been held quarterly. These meetings are essential to understanding our common problems and how to work our way out of them. The Legislative Commission on Indian Services coordinates all these meetings.

As Government Affairs Director of the Warm Springs Tribes, I have been honored to attend every state-tribal summit. All the tribal chairs have supper with the Governor, get to know her concerns and share their tribes' concerns and accomplishments. During a very full two days, our elected leaders, tribal agency directors and staffs meet with all the Governor's people. The result has always been very positive. We are grateful to Legislative Commission on Indian Services directors and staff for the intensive effort that they made to foster success of these government-

to-government summits. When I meet with tribal leaders from beyond Oregon, their stories are often about continuing conflict with their states. Leaders of tribes elsewhere call Oregon the gold standard for state-tribal relations. I am proud of our state for working with us.

I have also attended many of the Commission-organized state-tribal cluster meetings during two decades of our formal government-to-government relationship. These meetings are important for several reasons but from a budget standpoint, the most important one is avoiding litigation. This is particularly important in cultural resources protection. Our ancestors are in many places around the state, places that ODOT, for example, does not know about when it plans a bridge or bridge relocation. Having ODOT keep tribal cultural resources staff current on its construction plans has avoided several desecrations of our ancestors and related lawsuits. This is just one example of how the Commission on Indian Services keeps costs down for the state and the Tribes.

For the last several years, funding has been inadequate to do the needed cultural resources work. Commission personnel did a fine job with the resources they had but it is not possible to keep up with the potential harm, looting and destruction of these precious items and places without adding a position.

Thank you for considering the HB 5016 policy option package for the Legislative Commission on Indian Services on this 20th anniversary of our Government-to-Government Relationship. This will allow for work identified by the Cultural Items Task Force over the last two years to be done to protect important tangible reminders of our ancient cultures. On behalf of the Tribes, I urge you to increase funding for the Commission on Indian Services for cultural resources protection and save us from slipping back toward conflict and misunderstanding between our governments.