

Verbal Testimony
Chairman Faron Jackson, Sr., Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
United State Senate Committee on Indian Affairs
July 11, 2018

Chairman Hoeven (Ho-Ven), Vice Chairman Udall (You-Doll), and Members of the Committee, Boozhoo and greetings. My name is Faron Jackson, Sr., and I am proud to serve as the Chairman of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe.

I want to thank you for providing me the opportunity to appear before you today and for taking the time to review S. 2599, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act. Further, Senator Smith, I want to thank you for introducing this important legislation and for working closely with Senator Klobuchar and your colleagues to advance it. You have been a true friend to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and Indian Country as a whole.

The passage of this legislation is extremely important to our Tribe and will go a long way to restore our limited land base while preserving the land for future generations.

To provide a brief background, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is part of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, is comprised of over 9,500 Members, and is headquartered in North Central Minnesota. The Leech Lake Tribe holds the smallest percentage of its reservation of any of the state's tribes.

Of the 864,158 original acres, nearly 300,000 acres are surface area of the three big lakes in our region. Further, the Chippewa National Forest holds over seventy-five percent of the land within the boundaries of the reservation. This leaves less than 5% of land owned by the Leech Lake Band.

As you know, the legislation before you would transfer 11,760 acres of Chippewa National Forest land back to the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe which was taken from owners of tribal allotments through a process called "Secretarial Transfers".

Starting in the year 1948, the Bureau of Indian Affairs incorrectly interpreted a Department of Interior executive order and believed that they had the authority to sell these individual tribal allotments without getting the consent of the rightful owners.

These sales ceased in 1955 following a memo that the Bureau of Indian Affairs received from the United States Field Solicitor that advised them that these sales were illegal.

Of the 17,000 acres of tribal lands that were taken through this process, the biggest share – 11,760 acres - is located in Cass County, in and around the largest concentration of our tribal population as well as our Tribal Headquarters in Cass Lake.

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe has no immediate intention of changing the use of these lands. We would honor current agreements, and anticipate that these lands would be held until we develop a broader plan that will allow for a gradual subdivision of some of the tracts for economic and residential development. The land will be open to the public to hunt, fish, explore, hike, bike and enjoy!

We believe a significant tribal land base is the foundation of tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Federally recognized lands form the geographical limits of each tribe's jurisdiction, supports our residing tribal populations, is the basis of our tribal economy, and provides an irreplaceable forum for our cultural vitality, practices and traditions.

Within the Leech Lake community the lack of land has a direct impact on our ability to access adequate housing. This has been proven to jeopardize the health and safety of our Tribal Members and remains one of the biggest issues within Indian Country today.

For us, the passage for this legislation and securing of additional land is one of the critical components needed to continue our work to increase housing options and will positively impact Members of our tribe now and for generations to come.

Once again and on behalf of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Chi-Miigwetch for the invitation to

testify today. We know that there are many important matters which come before this Committee and are honored that you would take the time to review the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Reservation Restoration Act.

As you have heard, this legislation would go a long way to restore the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe's limited land base, while at the same time, honor current agreements and preserve the land for future generations.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Mr. Vice Chairman for holding this hearing, I look forward to answering any questions you may have.