

To: Inyo County Board of Supervisors
Date: 12/13/21
Re: Redistricting - Option 6

My name is Joyce White. I am a member of the Bishop Paiute Tribe and currently serve on the Bishop Paiute Tribal Council. I am writing this letter in support of Option 6 which calls for the formation of a tribal district. Before discussing my support of Option 6, I would first like to address concerns expressed by those who do not favor a tribal district.

Some are concerned that Option 6 is a blatant example of racial gerrymandering--a practice intended to establish an arguably unfair political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating the boundaries of electoral districts--this is not true of Option 6. Unlawful racial gerrymandering is about limiting minority power through either over or under representation. Option 6, instead, speaks in favor of giving proportional power to communities of shared interests. The tribes represent 15-17% of Inyo County's population. Granting the tribes control of 1 out of 5 supervisor seats is fair and complies with federal guidelines. Much has also been made of tribal members who have expressed their dissent to Option 6. All opinions are to be respected; however, I would like to remind the Board of Supervisors that dissent expressed by tribal members is no different than dissenting voices that may be heard in neighborhoods in the current districts. As you will likely agree, no one district is going to completely satisfy every constituent. I believe that Option 6 is the best alternative as it offers tribes an opportunity to have a seat at the table with respect to local government, at last.

Historically, tribes have never been invited to share their voice in determining their own destiny. We have endured government policies of extermination and forced relocation. It is a fact that the State of California endorsed bounties for the scalps and heads of the native population. We had no voice in speaking out against such atrocities. Our people were removed from their homelands in Payahuunadü (aka Owens Valley) and forced to march to Fort Tejon. We had no voice in speaking out against the forced march. Those natives who returned to their beloved Payahuunadü were forced onto small reservations, due in large part to the thirst of the City of Los Angeles for a source of water. Where the federal government had once set aside 67,000 acres of land for the local natives, the majority of that land base was subsequently revoked in favor of the City of Los Angeles. The Bishop Paiute Tribe ended up with a total of 875 acres. This was a far cry from a fair deal, yet we had no real voice in objecting to the taking of our land. The list goes on. Native American children were sent to federal boarding schools in an attempt to assimilate them into mainstream society by stripping them of their cultural identity, traditional beliefs, and native languages. Many children died in these boarding schools. We had no voice in the creation and stated purpose of these schools. Most Native Americans were not made citizens of the United States until 1924. This is not ancient history. My own parents were not deemed citizens when they were born even though their ancestors had always lived in this area. While our native people eventually obtained the right to vote, we still had no political voice. I cite these inequities, not to make any non-native feel guilty about what happened to our people but rather to provide an understanding of how far we have come.

Despite all that our native people have endured, we continue to persevere. Many tribal members have gone on to college and returned to help their respective tribes. Where we once fought wars against our colonizers on the battlefield, we now find ourselves fighting in the courts and political arena. It is in the context of this background that I support the formation of a tribal district to encompass the five tribal reservations in Inyo County. The reservations are all sovereign nations with shared economic and social interests, e.g., the provision of effective law enforcement on the reservations and a conflicted history of dealing with the City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Much of the land requested in Option 6 is uninhabited land which is of cultural significance to the tribes.

As evidenced by the petroglyphs throughout Inyo County, our people have inhabited these lands since time immemorial. We have survived every inequity that has been thrown at us. All we are asking for in Option 6 is an opportunity to have a collective voice in fair and effective representation at the local level. In 2024, it will be 100 years since Native Americans were granted citizenship and a right to vote. Redistricting only occurs once every ten years. The time has come to allow the tribes of Inyo County the right to have a proportionate share of votes and a dedicated voice in County government. Please do not make us wait another ten years.

Thank you for your consideration.

Joyce L. White