

News from Congressman Les AuCoin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AuCOIN BILL WOULD RESTORE RECOGNITION OF GRAND RONDE INDIANS

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Oregon Congressman Les AuCoin introduced legislation today in Congress to restore federal status to the Polk County-based Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Indians.

At a news conference with tribal vice-chairman Kathryn Harrison, AuCoin said the bill is supported by city, county and state officials, by business and civic organizations in Oregon, and is the product of years of careful preparation by the Grand Ronde tribes, with whose leaders AuCoin worked in drafting the measure.

In 1977, AuCoin steered through Congress a bill restoring tribal recognition to the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians in Lincoln County.

"With the full support of the community, the Grand Rondes have worked tirelessly to retain their identity as a people, to preserve their culture, and to achieve economic self-sufficiency," AuCoin said. "Restoration of tribal status places an important tool in the hands of a tribe which asks for no special privileges, but only for the opportunity to help itself."

By restoring federal status and their identity as an Indian tribe, the bill would enable the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Indians to qualify for education, health care and economic development programs administered by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other federal agencies. It would grant no hunting, fishing or trapping rights.

The Grand Ronde was one of approximately 100 Indian tribes which lost their official standing with the government in the 1950s and early 60s under an ill-fated policy known as "termination." Under that policy, AuCoin said, it was presumed that American Indians would be assimilated into the mainstream of American culture. A special commission appointed during the Carter Administration to review the policy reported in 1977 that it was a colossal disaster that led to the loss of hundreds of thousands of acres of tribal lands and made social and economic conditions worse instead of better for the tribes. Beginning in the 1970s, termination policy was abandoned.

Following the Grand Ronde's termination in 1954, the last of its reservation lands, which once totaled 69,000 acres, were sold. Stripped of federal recognition and of all tribal assets, the Grand Rondes struggled to retain their identity. In 1975, the confederated tribes reorganized under a revised constitution and bylaws, established a nonprofit corporation and took the first steps in a long process leading to restoration of their federal status.

With help from the Administration for Native Americans, church and private foundation grants, the Grand Rondes are obtaining administrative and management skills and are developing three pilot projects: a greenhouse in which bedding plants and vegetables are raised and marketed, a bead and craft shop, and the marketing of jams and jellies made from wild berries.

With restoration of tribal status, the Grand Ronde's governing council, in consultation with the Department of Interior, would be authorized to develop a plan to establish a reservation to serve as an economic land base, following the pattern of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians in Lincoln County. As in the case of the Siletz, separate congressional approval would be required for an economic land base to be established for the Grand Rondes.

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The Grand Ronde tribal office is located in Grand Ronde, on Highway 18, 41 miles west of Salem in Polk County, at the site of the former reservation. Tribal membership today is 1,276. Members live in 26 counties in Oregon and elsewhere in the United States.

There is no Grand Ronde tribe, as such. Ancestors of what is today the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Indians were from many tribes and bands that were removed in 1856 from their lands in the Willamette and Rogue valleys and along the Oregon coast to the Grand Ronde Reservation. The tribes included the Calapooya, Clackamas, Lackmuit (Luckiamute), Rogue River, Chasta, Umpqua, Molalla, Nestucca, Santiam, Tillamook, Wapato (Multnomah) and Yamhill.

The Grand Ronde Restoration Act is supported by the city councils of McMinnville, Sheridan and Willamina, the boards of commissioners of Polk and Yamhill counties, State Rep. Paul Hanneman (R-Cloverdale), State Sen. Dell Isham (D-Lincoln City) and Oregon Gov. Vic Atiyeh.

Organizations endorsing the bill include the West Valley (Sheridan) Chamber of Commerce, the Sheridan Rotary Club, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, the Friends Committee on National Legislation, the Yamhill and Polk County Historical Societies, the Presbytery of the Cascades, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, and the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, among others.

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