



WESTERN SHOSHONE DEFENSE PROJECT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Western Shoshone Oppose Federal Buyout of Homelands!!!

**Senate Hearing on Western Shoshone Claims Distribution Act (S958)
Friday August 2nd, 2PM, Dirksen 106**

Press Conference with Western Shoshone leaders

4:00 PM Friday, August 2nd, 2002

**At the Offices of the National Congress of American Indians
1301 Connecticut Ave., NW Washington DC 20036 phone: 202-466-7767**

Members of the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs will be conducting a hearing this afternoon on Senator Harry Reid's Western Shoshone Claims Distribution Act (S958) over the objections of Western Shoshone tribal leadership. Senate Bill S 958, which was developed by Senator Reid without the input of Western Shoshone Tribal Councils or Traditional leadership, would liquidate through a one time individual cash payment to tribal members a trust fund of over \$130,000,000 held by the federal government as compensation for the supposed extinguishment of Western Shoshone land title. The monetary award was the result of the proceedings of the Indian Claims Commission, proceedings that were opposed consistently by Western Shoshone from early 1950's to the present day and which are the subject of a recent report by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights which found the process used by the Claims Commission violated the fundamental human rights of the Western Shoshone people.

In 1979, the Secretary of Interior acting as trustee for Indian people, accepted the original monetary award of \$26,000,000 for the extinguishment of title and right to over 24,000,000 acres of land, land that now accounts for the majority of U.S. gold production and is experiencing a geothermal energy rush of unprecedented proportions. A recent vote conducted by a faction of individual tribal members promoting the cash distribution has been used by Senator Reid to demonstrate Shoshone support for the legislation, however "The vote was not authorized by the TeMoak Tribal Council," states Larsen Bill, Vice-Chairman of the Te-Moak Tribe of Western Shoshone. Raymond Yowell, Chief of the Western Shoshone Nation Council, a traditional government of the Western Shoshone said "No vote of the Shoshone can answer the question of how the U.S has acquired legal title to ur homelands."

The Western Shoshone Nation consists of 10 communities, most of which are now

recognized as independent sovereign tribes by the U.S. government. Senator Reid, however, has chosen to deal with only several individual tribal members advocating for the cash distribution, ignoring concerns and legislation developed by the Tribal governments. "When Senator Reid takes action on Shoshone issues, he does not communicate with our Tribal governments, instead we hear about his positions through the newspaper and press," says Fermina Stevens Chairperson of the Elko Band of Shoshone and Council member of the Te--Moak Tribe. "We want to see the government to government relationship honored by the U.S.," adds Harley Reynolds, Councilman on the Te-Moak and South Fork Band Councils. Senator Reid, who first introduced the legislation in 1999 has never once travelled to Shoshone country to discuss the legislation with any of the Tribal governments.

The failure of the United States to resolve Western Shoshone land issues has forced tribal leaders to go the international community for support. Complaints have been filed by several Tribal governments before the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, stating that the Indian Claims Commission and other U.S. agencies have used discriminatory means to deprive Western Shoshone people of their homeland. The OAS, through its Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, released a report this week finding the U.S had violated the rights of Western Shoshone citizens and traditionalist elders Mary and Carrie Dann, in particular violating their right to equality before the law, their right to a fair trial and their right to property, all in the context of Western Shoshone land rights. Most recently the Western Shoshone National Council has petitioned the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe requesting their assistance in investigating the U.S violation of Western Shoshone human rights urging the European community to pressure the U.S to enter negotiations with the Shoshone to resolve the conflict over their homelands. "We want to see the U.S. sit down with Western Shoshone leadership; Tribal Councils, Band Councils and Traditional leadership, to work out legislation that addresses the needs of all our communities. With all due respect to Senator Reid, he has not attempted to do this, and seems intent on railroading this monetary payment through which doesn't address our rights and needs," declared Carrie Dann, Western Shoshone elder and member of the Western Shoshone National Council.

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