

Les Minthorn, Chairman - Board of Trustees
Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
before the
House Revenue Committee – HB 4041
Hearing Room A, 3pm, February 6, 2021

The Board of Trustees is the governing body of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR). The CTUIR is a federally recognized tribal government as well as recognized by the State of Oregon on a government-to-government basis under ORS §§ 182.162-168.

The Board is elected by the Tribal membership to govern and manage the resources and rights of the CTUIR. The Umatilla, Walla Walla and Cayuse Tribes reserved the Umatilla Indian Reservation (Reservation) as a permanent homeland in the Treaty of 1855 with the United States. That Treaty ceded 6.4 million acres of land to the United States in northeast Oregon and southeast Washington while reserving rights to among other things, fish, hunt and gather in traditional use areas. The current Reservation consists of approximately 172,000 acres.

Land ownership throughout the Reservation is a very complex issue. The land ownership is a “checkerboard” consisting of Tribal trust, Tribal fee, individual Indian trust allotments and fee lands, non-Indian fee lands, federal and the State of Oregon. The Reservation population is comprised of approximately half tribal members and half non-Indians.

Today, the CTUIR government provides water, sewer, police and fire protection, emergency transport services and a variety of other public services to tribal members and non-Indians within the Reservation boundaries. However, Tribally owned fee lands are subject to property taxes, rather than being exempt like other state or local governments that are providing similar type public services. HB 4041 addresses this inconsistency and moves Oregon tax policy towards what is best for supporting services to our communities.

HB 4041 recognizes that tribes are governments responsible for providing governmental services for the welfare of our communities. This Bill further acknowledges that tribes are often best suited to provide such services in rural Reservation communities.

The CTUIR appreciates the efforts of Representative Bentz for his work on this bill. All of the participants in this process worked hard to reach a bill that recognized the interests of those involved and the work of tribes under existing tax policy. These discussions, while extensive, are not the end of the process, but the beginning. The CTUIR sees HB 4041 as another step along the path of tribal and state government-to-government cooperation begun under Governor Kitzhaber’s Executive Order 96-30 later codified in ORS §§ 182.162-168.