



PETER COURTNEY
President of the Senate

House Rules Committee

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*TESTIMONY BY SENATOR PETER COURTNEY
SUPPORTING SB 3
APRIL 17, 2013*

Chair Garrett, Vice Chairs Hoyle and Hicks, members of the House Rules Committee: thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of SB 3.

My name is Peter Courtney. I'm the state Senator for District 11. That includes Woodburn, Gervais, and east Salem.

SB 3 seeks to increase the number of legislators appointed to serve on the Indian Services Commission.

Nearly 30 years ago the State of Oregon recognized the need to create a permanent point of contact and on-going forum for tribal-state issues. The Commission on Indian Services (CIS) was created by statute in 1975 to improve services to Native Americans in Oregon. Its members are appointed jointly by the Senate President and the Speaker of the House to a two-year term. CIS members select their own officers to serve one-year terms of office.

This body advises the Legislative and Executive branches on ways to improve communication and coordination with tribes in an effort to avoid unnecessary court disputes and to highlight shared interests. Prior to its establishment, there was no good way for state government to consider Indian concerns directly.

The Commission serves as a forum for the exchange of information between state government and Indian communities; and it serves as a catalyst for bringing about change where change is needed.

Currently, I'm responsible for making appointments to 75 boards, commissions, and task forces, and that number is rising. Colleagues, you can't imagine how difficult it is to find Senators that are willing and able to serve on all these boards that are also motivated enough to show up to meetings.

The Indian Services Commission is different. Legislators want to be a part of this – it is a coveted assignment. I'm not sure exactly why this is. Maybe it's because Native Americans are an incredibly important part of our heritage and history, as a nation and as a people.

I think adding to the membership of this Commission is important to strengthen the ties and increase understanding between our government and theirs. As such, it is important to have bipartisan representation from both the House and the Senate. That is why I introduced this bill – to add one appointed member from each chamber to serve on the Commission.

The bill was amended in committee from the original, as the tribes took the opportunity to clean-up the membership roster a bit – and wrote an amendment to delete the Willamette Valley position which has been vacant for over a decade and specify that the Portland area position should be a Title V Urban Indian Health representative.

This bill, like the Commission, is collaboration between the legislature and the tribes. I am pleased the tribes support this bill. I believe additional legislators on the Commission would be a good thing, so I respectfully encourage you to support this measure as well.

Thank you.