

SEPTEMBER 25, 2016

Let local leaders do their jobs

President Ronald Reagan once said, "The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government, and I'm here to help."

When Washington bureaucrats get involved in local issues, the effect on the community can be more hurtful than helpful. Our community is experiencing this right now, as we fight back against the federal government overstepping its boundaries. President Reagan — himself a longtime resident of our community — cautioned against this very scenario.

On Sept. 8, talks continued between Santa Barbara County officials and the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians regarding the future of a 1,400-acre agriculturally zoned parcel known as Camp 4. The meeting went as all the others had — it was a one-sided

affair with the county placing proposal after proposal on the table only to be rejected or deferred by the tribal leadership. Once again, the county offered alternatives — some even in opposition to long-held county land-use policies — to meet the tribe's need for a new housing development and other tribal facilities. Officials have bent over backward to find a suitable solution.

At the meeting, numerous citizens spoke in support of trying to accommodate the tribe's needs for housing and tribal facilities, echoing the county's desire to work with the tribe in good faith. There has been a sincere effort to be good neighbors and allow the tribe to expand housing opportunities as necessary for the good of their community.

Remarkably, despite the tribe's intransi-

gence, the county and the tribe found common ground on the issue of limited waiver of sovereign immunity — an issue that needed resolution before any county-tribal agreement could be enforceable.

One could look optimistically at the county-tribe discussions and say they are progressing in resolving this longstanding debate. However, certain Washington politicians want to fast-track the process and go around local authorities and the residents of the Santa Ynez Valley and Santa Barbara County in the form of legislation: H.R. 1157.

Last summer, a U.S. House of Representatives subcommittee demanded that the county and the tribe commence negotiations. While these discussions were occurring here locally, some members of Congress representing other

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Please see **JACKSON** on **C4**

Congress should stay out of local affairs

■ JACKSON

Continued from Page C1

districts far away from the Santa Ynez Valley are now pushing this bill forward to make the whole process, and all of the negotiations up until now, completely irrelevant.

With H.R. 1157, Congress seeks to insert itself into local land use, transferring the land and bestowing significant privileges on the owner of the large parcel at the expense of the neighboring landowners, taxpayers and communities. It is nothing more than a special-interest bill that enriches a single party — in this case, the Chumash — by allowing potentially unlimited urban sprawl and extensive commercial development at the expense of current and future residents.

The congressional representatives doing the bidding of the tribe are trying to insert Congress into the local land-use decisions of Santa Barbara County, where they neither reside nor represent. They are doing so over the objections of the area's congressional representative, Lois Capps, and the county government. Moreover, they have chosen to take these actions without any attempts to engage the im-

pected communities or even visit our area.

Our community worked for 10 years on a comprehensive land-use plan for the Santa Ynez Valley. Volunteers worked evenings after work and on weekends to preserve the history, character, and environmental and water resources that make this area special. They worked hard to preserve the rural character and charm that form the economic basis for the commerce, ecotourism, agriculture, ranching, farming and small businesses that are the heart of our valley. This proposed legislation would negate all of that hard work and give the recipients of the land an exemption from county oversight, zoning laws, and certain environmental regulations.

The most important functions of local government are to protect the quality of life and public safety, and create economic opportunity for every citizen. If H.R. 1157 becomes law, Congress will trump the efforts of our elected local government to fulfill these essential responsibilities.

Congress should reject this special-interest legislation and allow the tribe and the county to resolve these issues on the local level, without Washington interference.