



Opinions and Letters

Opinion: This community has rights, too

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There is a document called the United States Constitution and this document gives the citizens of the Santa Ynez Valley the right to disagree with the government that governs us.

Unlike some governments that deny citizens the right to dissent, we have the right to disagree with our governing body and to challenge decisions made by our government.

The dispute over the 6.9-acre parcel that the Chumash tribe is asking to be placed into trust is a dispute we are having with our government. If this community had been allowed to be part of a process that we feel we have a right to be part of, we would not be bringing a lawsuit against the federal government.

We have the right to do that.

When the community that is affected the most by tribal expansion is not even considered in the tribal land acquisition process and is basically being ignored by the Interior Board of Indian Appeals and told they are not protected under the law despite clear legal precedent to the contrary, there is something very wrong, and this community has the right and a responsibility to demand that our rights be protected.

We think the decision by the IBIA was a miscarriage of justice and our call for judicial review is crucial if we are to protect, in perpetuity, our rights as citizens of this community.

The Chumash tribe taking the 6.9-acre parcel "into trust" does not benefit this community. This has never been about the tribe building a cultural center. We have always maintained that it is the removal of this land from state and local control that is the issue.

The tribe could have built the cultural center over four years ago, as long as they complied with local zoning and building regulations. They do not need to annex the property to do that. The tribe can buy as much land as they want as private property owners. We are just saying "no more annexation."

To allow land to be taken into trust and out of state and local rules and regulations that have been set up by this community and our elected officials to protect our community and the environment is wrong.

Circumventing fair and equitable land-use rules and regulations by any individual or government is wrong. Telling a community they cannot be heard is wrong. Not having an open and transparent government process is wrong. Different land-use rules and regulations for individuals or groups, tribal and non-tribal, living in the same community, is wrong.

The taxes that will be imposed on taxpaying neighbors to compensate for development that is outside state and local regulations is wrong.

Preservation of Los Olivos (POLO) and Preservation of Santa Ynez (POSY) have taken our dispute with our government to federal court to ensure a voice for this community. We just want our day in court. We look forward to a continued dialogue and believe this is an important local and national debate.

It bears repeating that the beauty of our democracy is that we can disagree and we can look to our judicial system when there is a real or perceived injustice.

We have the right to be heard. There is nothing extreme about our request -- we just want to be heard.

Jon Bowen

The author is president of Preservation of Santa Ynez