

Testimony of Representative John D. Dingell  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
H.R. 4115: Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Land  
Claims  
H.R. 2176: Mills Indian Community Land Claims  
February 6, 2008

---

Chairman Rahall, Ranking Member Young and Members of the Committee, thank you for holding this hearing today and for being here to listen to the merits of this proposal. I would also like to thank Mayor Alan Lambert of Romulus, Michigan and Aaron Payment of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians for taking time out of their busy schedules to be here today. I would like to thank Representative Candace Miller for her work on this issue. Lastly, I would like to thank Representative Bart Stupak for his tireless efforts to settle the very legitimate land dispute in his district.

I am here today to talk about an economic opportunity for a state that continues to be affected disproportionately by domestic and global economic forces. Michigan's unemployment rate of 7.5 percent leads the nation. Michigan's median household income

has decreased by 11.9 percent since 2000 and the State has lost over 350,000 jobs.

The opportunity presented in H.R. 4115 will bring 2,700 well-paying, on-site, union jobs to Michigan's 15<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. In addition to that number, we are looking at 1,400 construction jobs – also union – needed to build the facility. Mr. Chairman, this is an opportunity for Michigan we simply cannot afford to turn down.

The legislation I introduced would extinguish the land claims in the area of the Sault Tribe. In exchange, the legislation will grant the Sault tribe alternative lands in Otsego County, Michigan and Romulus, Michigan as outlined in the settlement agreement. These alternative lands would become part of the reservation of the Sault Tribe community.

In addition, my legislation directs the Secretary of the Interior to take these lands into trust as land obtained in a settlement of a land claim under the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

Now, throughout this hearing you are going to hear from opponents to these bills. Some may say enough is enough, the State simply does not need another casino. Others will express strong opposition based on the fact that the proposed facility is supposedly too far away from the original reservation. While still others may say that the Southeast Michigan gaming market is already saturated. To those opposed to these pieces of legislation, I simply say, let's not create a battle between those communities that have casinos versus those communities that do not. Rather, let us work together to help extinguish legitimate land disputes that have been around for generations while at the same time allowing investment in our communities and our State. Let us build a brighter Michigan that creates thousands of well paying, union jobs that will help our state recover from the recent job losses we have experienced.

I would like to submit for the record the Settlement Agreement between the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and the State of Michigan. Entered into in 2002 by then- Governor John Engler, the Settlement stems from a long standing dispute on lands in Charlotte Beach, Chippewa County, Michigan. Now some will erroneously say these land claims are not legitimate. To those folks, I ask you to listen to the testimony here today, including that

of our good colleague Mr. Stupak – who will tell you of muddied titles, uncertain property rights and diminished property values. As you will see, the Settlement Agreement forms the basis for action by Congress to extinguish the Charlotte Beach land claim in return for alternative lands to be taken into trust for the Tribe in either:

1. Monroe County south of the Raisin River;
2. The City of Romulus; or
3. The City of Flint

Now, both Monroe and Romulus are in Michigan's 15<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. For many months, Monroe and Romulus discussed whether or not they wanted a casino. Eventually, Monroe fell out of the running while the City of Romulus expressed continued interest. In fact, voters in Romulus passed a referendum in December 2003 with 57% in support of approving a casino to be built in that city. The Sault Tribe has voluntarily elected to pursue only the possibility of alternative land in Romulus.

You will hear from folks today that the voters of Michigan expressly voted in 2004 against any expanded gaming in the State. I would like to submit for the record the text of proposal 04-1,

which very clearly states that the proposal “does not apply to Indian tribal gaming or gaming in up to three casinos located in the City of Detroit”.

I understand the concerns of the Detroit Mayor and some other Members of Congress that a new casino in Romulus would adversely impact Detroit. An awful lot has been invested into the gaming facilities within the City. I would like to submit for the record an economic analysis by Drs. Gary Wolfram and Bruce Ikawa. The analysis, based on a complex equation, suggests there would be “no statistical effect of competition on casinos within a 60 mile range or a 120 mile range”. So, Mr. Chairman, as you can see, there is ample economic opportunity to go around.

I would like to take just a moment to express my disappointment and dismay at the lobbying tactics used by some of the opponents of my bill. As many of you may have read, the Port Huron Times Herald broke a story yesterday linking Gambling Watch, a recently established “anti-gambling group” asking citizens to speak out against the opening of any new casinos in Michigan, to the MGM Grand Casino in Detroit. The good and honest people who are legitimately opposed to gambling would be shocked and appalled to learn they are being used by people employing shady lobbying

tactics reminiscent of Jack Abramoff. I look forward to hearing from some of the opponents here today about whether or not they were involved in these dubious tactics.

I understand Mr. Chairman that a very comprehensive looking binder was delivered to Members' offices late yesterday. I would like to take a moment to address just a couple of things in that binder: One – many of the letters in there are out-dated and are no longer relevant. Two – Tab F has absolutely nothing to do with the legislation under consideration here today. As you can see, the Bureau of Indian Affairs rejected the Hannahville Tribe's request to develop off-reservation gaming in Romulus. Under discussion today is a legitimate land claim involving the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe. And three: Tab G contains a study of the potential impact of expanded gaming on the City of Detroit. I would note there is no reference in the binder as to who did the study.

Finally, I would like to submit into the record a few additional documents. First, a letter from Wayne County Commissioner Edward Boike in support of H.R. 4115. As you will see, Commissioner Boike talks about the job opportunities derived from this legislation for Wayne County. Additionally, I would like to submit a letter from the International Union of Bricklayers and

Allied Craftworkers. As you can see, Michigan stands to gain an additional 1,400 jobs from the construction aspect of this project. I would also like to submit letters from Governor Granholm of Michigan in support of both H.R. 4115 and H.R. 2176. Lastly, I would ask that letters from Representatives Stupak, Miller and myself dated November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2007 and February 5, 2008 in response to opposition claims be included in the record.

Since both bills before you here today derive from land settlement agreements that originate from the same land dispute, it is critically important that both bills move together so this matter may be resolved completely and in a timely manner.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.