

Robert Stevens  
Freeport  
LD 2007

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Robert Stevens. I live in Freeport. I am a retired attorney from the Curtis Thaxter law firm. I have reviewed the history of the Settlement Act and writings about it.

Many of those opposed to amending the Act to give Maine's tribes the access to federal law enjoyed by other tribes in effect are saying a deal is a deal; their negotiators agreed to it and shame on the tribes if they try to change it. Yes, they agreed to it; but they had no real choice. As the tribes' attorney, Tom Tureen, testified at the Joint Committee on Indian Land Claims' 1980 public hearing said, the reason they agreed "...is that (they) were obliged to if they wanted to effectuate the settlement of the monetary and land aspects of the claim which they had already worked out with the Carter Administration".

Regardless of whether the Settlement Act is or was ever fair, it just doesn't make sense to refuse to change it. The December 2022 Research Report of the The Harvard Project shows how far the Maine tribes are economically lagging behind the nation's other tribes. The only discernible difference is that other tribes have access to the opportunities offered by federal laws. Something else the Report reveals is that those living in surrounding areas in other states also benefit from tribes having access to federal laws. Many of surrounding areas in Maine might share in progress of the tribes.

Some make the fear argument: the Act shouldn't be amended because "chaos" would result from possible conflicts between tribal law and Maine law in the 25 parcels spread over 250,000 acres. Most of those parcels predated the Settlement Act. A close look at a Maine map reveals that a handful of parcels located in sparsely populated areas account for the vast majority of these acres. The possibility of conflicts is overblown. If conflicts occur, evidence from other states shows that good faith efforts to resolve them will be successful. Also it's ironic that the scattered nature of the parcels is held against the tribes. They are scattered, not by choice of the tribes, but by past state policies that pushed tribes from their lands.

Please report LD 2007 out with a strong out to pass.