

LD 785

The current quasi-municipality status of the Tribes in Maine is not working. The research shows that establishing the Tribes as sovereign nations will bring prosperity to both the tribal communities and the surrounding communities and to Maine in general.

One issue for opposing the bill that is heard often: having pockets of sovereign land is too complicated legally to manage. The time has come for the State to address the reality that current tribal status does not benefit the tribes or the state of Maine.

History is at play here – we can move forward and reframe the State/Tribal relationship. The Maine Land Claims Settlement Implementation Act was meant to be a flexible document. Let us look at sovereignty as an opportunity for tribal and state leaders to work together. Time has come to build a community of leaders looking to find solutions of mutual benefit. At this moment, the State of Maine can vote to be positive agents of change.

The task force recommendations have been discussed for several years. They have been tweaked (ie gambling removed) and have unanimous support of the members of the task force. The State leaders and Tribes could approach solving issues, not from an adversarial position but from one of collaboration. There are models - Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission was created by the Settlement Act to work on solving Tribal-State issues.

Tribal sovereignty is an issue that will not go away; the tribes are not leaving their homeland, and supporters of sovereignty for the tribes are not going away either. Tribes are acquiring land promised in the Indian Land Claims settlement act. If LD 785 and LD 395 become law this will give us an opportunity to usher in a new era of collaboration between State leaders and Tribal leaders. Both bills are based on consensus recommendations from a bipartisan task force convened by the Maine Legislature to address long-standing issues with a land claims act passed in 1980 that governs the relationship between the state and the tribes in Maine.

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