

## SAMPLE LETTER

May \_\_\_\_, 2004

Honorable Congressman \_\_\_\_\_,

I write this letter in opposition to the Western Shoshone Distribution Bill sponsored by Congressman Gibbons and Senator Harry Reid of Nevada. The bill has been reported to the full House as HR884/S618. I ask you, as a member of Congress to stop this bill and to initiate an investigation with the Inspector General's office or other appropriate body to determine what is really going on with this attempt to silence the Western Shoshone Nation.

If passed, HR 884/S 618 could have devastating impacts on the people of Nevada, the Western Shoshone and the United States. The bill is an attempt to pay off the Western Shoshone for part of their ancestral land base – where they still live and pray – approximately 24 million acres of land, most of which the U.S. classifies as “public” lands . In order to force the people off the land, the Department of Interior has conducted several armed roundups of Western Shoshone livestock over the past two years. These actions are being taken despite a recognition of the Western Shoshone land base in the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley – as a member of Congress, how can we ignore a fully ratified Treaty and force an unwanted payment on people? Impacts from passage of this bill include escalating disputes and litigation over native rights under the 1863 Treaty of Ruby Valley, loss of economic benefits to tribal and local communities and loss of international respect for the United States on its policies regarding indigenous peoples. Who benefits? The beneficiaries of this theft of Western Shoshone lands are the Mining, Energy and Nuclear industries. Western Shoshone land encompasses the world's third largest production of gold, cited by the USGS in 1999 as the number one investment opportunity for mineral extraction companies; the area has also been described by one Nevada politician as the next “Saudi Arabia” of geothermal energy production; and the land at issue includes Yucca Mountain – proposed site of the nation's nuclear waste repository – and the Nevada Test Site – where the Bush administration has referenced possible renewed nuclear weapons testing.

Last year, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights found that with regard to the Western Shoshone, the U.S. is currently in violation of rights to property, due process and equality under the law. In the fall of 2003, a federal lawsuit was filed on behalf of Western Shoshone in the U.S. District Court in D.C. (*Western Shoshone, et al. v. U.S.* Case No. 03-CV-2009). HR 884/S 618 raises fundamental questions about how the federal government treats indigenous peoples and represents an appalling example of current U.S. policy. The Western Shoshone need to address their hunting and fishing and gathering of food and medicinal plants. Their children need to feel connected to the lands of their ancestors. The Western Shoshone are the caretakers of these lands and the Distribution Bill threatens their existence as Western Shoshone people. They deserve good faith negotiations or a hearing in a fair judicial proceeding, not 15 cents an acre and spiritual genocide.

I can no longer stand for the abuses against native peoples, fundamental human rights and the rights of the future generations. That is not what this country should stand for. We must do the right thing now regarding the people who have afforded all of us the land we now live on and our own right to prosper, at unbelievable cost to their own lives and well being. Hopefully, we have evolved into a nation where we will protect as equally as our own, the rights of the original Indian Nations of this land.

Thank you for your attention to this serious issue and your opposition to HR 884/S 618.

Sincerely,