

STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN WALTER JONES (NC-3)

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE HEARING ON THE "LUMBEE RECOGNITION ACT" (H.R. 31)

March 18, 2009

Chairman/Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As a former member of this Committee, I have long been interested in the issue of federal acknowledgment, and I believe this is an important matter for the Committee's consideration.

I do not believe, however, that Congress should disregard the federal acknowledgment process at the Department of the Interior. We may not like its results or its inefficiencies, but it is still necessary to help answer the difficult questions about the merits of federal acknowledgment. Yes, Congress has acknowledged tribes in the past. But since 1978, the federal government has had a process in place to answer these difficult questions.

To this end, I have cosponsored a bill (H.R. 839) with my fellow North Carolinian Heath Shuler that would address this issue as it relates to Indian groups whose access to the process has been limited by the 1956 Lumbee Act. I believe Congress should lift that restriction and let all those groups complete the process, even on an expedited basis. Under the Shuler bill, the Lumbee are one of the groups that would be free to access the process once again.

Furthermore, I would argue that Congress is not well equipped to deal with the complex questions inherent in federal recognition. It's not like other situations in the past where there is absolutely no doubt about the identity of the tribe because of treaty relations with the United States. In this case, the Lumbees have never had such a relationship.

Mr. Chairman, to the extent that the recognition process needs to be reformed, then let us focus on reforming that process. But let us not let politics reign and throw merit out the window by pursuing individual recognition bills.

Thank you.