



June 1, 2004

**Floor Statement for H.R. 2912,  
To reaffirm the inherent sovereign rights of the Osage Tribe to determine its membership  
and form of government**

**Washington, D.C.**-Mr. Speaker, I am here today to issue strong support for H.R. 2912, to reaffirm the inherent sovereign rights of the Osage Tribe to determine its membership and form of government. Because of a law created in 1906, the Osage Tribe was not afforded the same rights as every other federally recognized tribe. According to that law, membership in the tribe would be extended only to those that owned a share in the Osage mineral estate and their descendants. Today, there are thousands of Osage Indians denied the benefits of membership simply because they do not hold a share of the estate.

**H.R. 2912, which I introduced in July of 2003, was designed to clarify the 98 year-old law.** It is intended to put the Osage Tribe on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes by allowing them to determine their own membership criteria and system of government while protecting the headrights of the shareholders. And I believe, most importantly, it will give many young Osage the opportunity to take part in Indian programs that have previously been denied to them.

At a field hearing in March of this year, members of the Resources Committee and I heard testimony from members of the Osage Tribe as well as others involved with Indian Affairs. It was clear, from the warm reception the bill received, that the Osage people are prepared for the right to decide for themselves who is and is not a tribal member. Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of H.R. 2912, bringing them one step closer to finally receiving that right.