

Sen. Merkley opposed to Maletis land deal

By: Rachel Cavanaugh

Woodburn Independent, April 29, 2010

AURORA — Sen. Jeff Merkley has expressed opposition to a possible land deal north of the Aurora State Airport with the Maletis brothers.

The deal, reported for some time to be brewing between the Klamath Tribes and landowners Chris and Tom Maletis, would “set a terrible precedent and create a significant loophole in the state’s land use system,” the senator said.

“(The proposal) would effectively undo the determination made by Clackamas County and Metro that certain lands be designated as rural reserve,” Merkley said, in a letter to the city of Wilsonville.

“If the land were put into a trust, it does not appear that the Land Conservation and Development Commission or the local governments involved would have any further say.

“I would be very opposed to such an outcome,” the senator said.

He added that, should the proposal move forward, he is prepared to enter the discussion with the Department of Interior and explain his concerns.

The senator was writing in response to a letter from the city of Wilsonville, in which the mayor and city council opposed the deal, concerning land where Langdon Farms Golf Club is located.

Hubbard City Council drafted a similar letter to the governor and local politicians earlier this year. Part of the concern, according to the local governments opposed, is that if the tribe acquired the land, it could use a 1986 law (Klamath Indian Tribe Restoration Act) to make the property tribal. If that were to happen, all tribal laws and regulations would apply.

“If this interpretation of the act were to be upheld, serious consequences could ensue for many jurisdictions — at the local, state and federal levels,” read the letter from Hubbard. “One could assume that other developers could employ the Klamath Tribe to use the act as a tool to circumvent federal, state and local laws and ordinances.”

Hubbard councilors said the act allows the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to take into trust for the tribe lands that are located anywhere —

even in areas where the Klamath Tribe has no historical or ancestral roots.

Hubbard's letter stressed they are not opposed to development of the land, but specifically the deal with the Klamath Tribe.

The Maletis property has now been the subject of controversy for over a year, with protesters arguing the area should remain farmland.

Some have voiced suspicions that a casino could be in the works.