



Quinault Indian Nation Testimony
United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearing
March 9, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Ryan Hendricks, 6th Councilman of the Quinault Indian Nation's ("Quinault" or "QIN") Business Committee, the elected government of Quinault. I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing to understand the funding needs of the country's Tribal Nations.

The Quinault Reservation (Reservation) is located on the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and abuts the Pacific Ocean. Quinault has over 3,000 tribal members. My testimony focuses on the following priorities: (1.) funding for Tribes to address the many negative impacts of climate change and related relocation efforts Tribes are undertaking; (2.) funding to address the unacceptable rates concerning murdered and missing indigenous women in our country; and (3.) advanced appropriations for India Health Services.

U.S. Responsibility to Meet its Treaty and Trust Obligations to the Quinault People

Through treaties, executive orders, and other agreements, Indian Tribes ceded hundreds of millions of acres of their homelands to the federal government. In return, the United States made promises to provide for the education, health, and welfare of reservation residents. For the Quinault people, the promises of the United States were detailed in the Treaty of Olympia, which was signed on July 1, 1855, and on January 25, 1856 (11 Stat. 971). The lands and waters of the Quinault Reservation consist of 207,150 acres of pristine forestlands, mountains, rivers, lakes, and 25 miles of relatively undisturbed Pacific coastline. The United States has failed to meet its treaty obligations as federal spending continues to fall short of demand. These funding deficiencies have only been exacerbated by economic factors like inflation, and in aggregate they impede Quinault's ability to provide necessary government services.

As a result, Quinault spent \$1.74 Million in FY21 to supplement inadequate levels of federal funding. This does not include Quinault's diligence in grant applications to supplement programs that should be funded through the United States trust obligation.

Before discussing Quinault’s priorities for fiscal year (FY) 2024, I would like to thank the Subcommittee and Congress for their efforts to ensure the Indian Health Service (IHS) received Advanced Appropriations for FY 2024 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023. These appropriations will help ensure that IHS services to Tribal Nations in fiscal year 2024 are protected from being disrupted due to any delay or interruption of the annual appropriations process. This has been a top priority for Quinault as previous government shutdowns, and similar delays of funding, have disrupted IHS services to Tribal citizens.

Taholah Village and Queets Village Relocation - Increased Funding for the BIA Office of Tribal Climate Resilience Programs

As we have testified to the Subcommittee in the past, there are two major villages located within our Reservation. The Village of Taholah and the Village of Queets, both of which have been significantly harmed, and continue to be threatened further, by climate change.

Taholah is located in the southern portion of the Reservation at the mouth of the Quinault River on the Pacific coast and consists of two locations known as the “Upper Village” and “Lower Village,” the latter of which is located below sea level. Quinault has had models prepared by the Washington Department of Natural Resources that show a potential of tsunami inundation of 40-50 feet in depth in most of the Lower Village of Taholah, well above the elevation of the tallest building in the village. A tsunami event at the Village of Taholah would be catastrophic for our Tribe, resulting in unprecedented loss of life. Further, climate change threatens to compromise QIN government operations, and critical government infrastructure and services.

Historically, large earthquake and tsunami events along the Cascadia Subduction Zone have occurred every 300 to 500 years. The last such event happened in February of 1700, so the 300-year threshold has already been breached. Approximately 650 residents live within the tsunami zone in the Taholah Lower Village. Important Quinault social and cultural institutions are also located in the tsunami inundation zone and flood prone area. For example, K-12 Taholah School, Community Center, Fire Cache, Police Station, Courts, Jail, Veterans Park, Taholah Mercantile (our only store and gas station), Fitness Center, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Housing Authority, Canoe Carving Shed, Enterprise Board, and Museum (the repository of Quinault culture) all currently exist in this vulnerable area. On a typical weekday, at least 60 employees of the Quinault Indian Nation work in the lower Taholah Village.

A comprehensive 2012 report was contracted by QIN to understand the effects of climate change on sea levels. The report, entitled “Relative Sea Level Change Along Quinault Indian Reservation Marine Coastlines,” found that the combined effects of thermal expansion of ocean waters, vertical land deformation (e.g., tectonic movements), melting glaciers, ice fields, and seasonal water surface elevation changes due to local atmospheric circulation effects will result in sea level increases, substantially increasing flood risk in the Lower Village of Taholah. The report further noted that the changes posed by climate change, including increased winter precipitation, soil saturation, and flow into the Quinault River, will compound and increase the coastal flood risks to the Lower Village of Taholah.

Already, high tides, high winds, and storm surge conditions have led to waves breaking over the seawall that protects the Lower Taholah Village from coastal surges. The seawall was breached in 2014, prompting a state of emergency to be declared. While the Army Corps of Engineers replaced the seawall, it is not a permanent solution. We have since had multiple events that have flooded the Village. The highest flood reaching into our village in the winter of 2022 that caused the evacuation of a dozen residential homes and seven government buildings including our court house, community center, post office, and our community services office spaces.

QIN determined through multiple public processes, including a General Council Resolution (a vote taken by the entire Tribe), that enabling the movement of residents, businesses, and institutions from the Lower Village of Taholah to a new Upper Village Relocation Area was the only solution to address ongoing climate events and threats. In response, our Tribe formulated a Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan (Master Plan). The Master Plan was adopted by the Quinault Indian Nation Business Committee (the governing body of Quinault) on June 26, 2017. With completion and adoption of the Master Plan, Quinault has been building an Upper Taholah Village which is safe from flooding and tsunamis.

The Master Plan incorporates the vision of the community members, and addresses sustainable practices, cultural beliefs, and necessarily improved community facilities. I am happy to report to the Subcommittee that we have thus far completed 50% of phase one infrastructure in the Upper Village. We still need to complete all of phase two and phase three infrastructure and relocation of all government buildings at and current estimated costs over \$400,000,000 for completion. .

In addition to Taholah, we are developing a relocation plan for the Village of Queets. The Nation has identified and secured the land for the relocation of Queets. We must next develop a Master Relocation Plan for Queets, which will cost an estimate of \$1 million. Until the Master Plan is complete, we do not know the overall estimated cost of moving the Village of Queets.

Quinault will need assistance from our trustee, the federal government, to continue implementing the Taholah Master Plan and to begin execution of our Queets relocation plan. These relocation efforts will ensure that our citizens are safe and our government operations continue. We thank the Subcommittee for increasing the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program by \$3 million from FY 2022 to FY 2023, to a total of \$35 million. Because of the urgent need to expedite the relocation of coastal Tribal Villages, we ask the Subcommittee to fund these programs at \$61 million in FY 2024. This funding will help Quinault and other coastal Tribes ensure they can move their populations to safer and higher ground in order to combat rising sea levels and increasingly severe weather events caused by climate change.

Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women Epidemic

Late last year, Representative Kilmer introduced the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act. The bill would implement the recommendations laid out by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' December 2018 report, "Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans." The report evaluated whether the federal government has met its trust and treaty obligations to Native Nations, particularly when it comes to federal funding. The report determined that the federal government has systematically failed to honor its promises and trust responsibilities.

Once the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act is passed, we request the Subcommittee fully fund the many grant programs authorized in it, including: programs for Native victims of crime, victim advocates for Native victims of all crimes, a national Indian Country clearinghouse on sexual assault, funding for housing, and funding for related education programs.

Indian Health Services Funding and Advanced Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2025

The Subcommittee took historic action to protect the health and well-being of Tribal people by including advanced Appropriations for IHS funding in FY 2024 as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of FY 2023. We ask the Subcommittee to again enact advanced appropriations in the FY 2024 bill for FY 2025 to ensure that health services are not disrupted in the coming years.

We request the Subcommittee include advance appropriations funding for FY 2025 Indian Health Service at a minimum of \$4.6 billion as part of the FY 2024 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Conclusion

The Quinault Indian Nation is taking the steps necessary to protect and build a brighter future for our people. We are doing our part to improve the lives of our people, to keep them safe and create opportunity on the Reservation. But we cannot do it alone. We urge the Subcommittee to honor treaty and trust responsibilities to Quinault and to support the above requests as well as the requests of the National Congress of American Indians and the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians. Again, thank you for allowing me to testify today.