



**Testimony of President Guy Capoeman
Quinault Indian Nation
to the Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies of the United States House of Representatives
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Day
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Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today. As you know, my name is Guy Capoeman, and I am honored to serve as the duly elected President of the Quinault Indian Nation's Business Committee. I have held this position for the past four years and am currently serving in my second term. It is a privilege to represent the Quinault people and to advocate for issues that are vital to our community's well-being and future.

The Quinault Indian Nation's Reservation is located in the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State, bordering the Pacific Ocean. Our reservation spans over 200,000 acres of pristine forestlands, rivers, lakes, and mountains, including 25 miles of relatively undisturbed Pacific coastline. With over 4,000 enrolled members, the Quinault Indian Nation is deeply committed to protecting our land, our resources, and our people. Today, I will focus my testimony on several critical issues, including:

1. Executive Order Freezing IRA and BIL Funding and OMB Funding Freeze
2. Increased funding for the BIA Tribal Community Resilience Program,
3. Establishing funding to address the unacceptable rates concerning murdered and missing indigenous people in our country,
4. Advanced appropriations for Indian 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 Tribal citizens. 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).

Unfortunately, the federal government has consistently failed to meet its treaty obligations. Chronic underfunding, worsened by economic factors like inflation, continues to impede the Quinault Nation's ability to deliver essential services. Since 2021, we have been forced to supplement inadequate federal funding to meet the needs of our citizens. My testimony today highlights several specific funding priorities that require immediate attention.

Executive Order Freezing IRA and BIL Funding and OMB Funding Freeze

On January 20, 2025, the Administration issued an Executive Order titled "*Unleashing American Energy*," which halted disbursements for programs funded under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. This funding freeze has had significant and detrimental impacts on the Quinault Indian Nation and other Tribal Nations.

Furthermore, on January 27, 2025, the Office of Management and Budget issued memorandum M-25-13, which temporarily paused the distribution of most federal financial assistance programs, including those critical to the Quinault Indian Nation. While the memo was rescinded two days later, certain funding remains inaccessible. Alarming, there are also reports indicating the potential for permanent suspensions or complete terminations of certain impacted programs.

The decision to freeze funding that Congress has already appropriated for Tribal Nations is unacceptable. Such actions undermine the federal government's trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribes, disrupt essential programs, and hinder Tribal efforts to address urgent challenges such as climate change, infrastructure development, public safety, and cultural preservation.

We respectfully urge this Subcommittee to work with the Administration to immediately unfreeze these funds and ensure that Tribal Nations, including the Quinault, can access the resources Congress has allocated. These funds are critical to advancing the well-being of our communities and fulfilling the federal government's obligations to Indian Country.

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

As we have previously testified to this Subcommittee, Quinault has two major villages on its reservation, the Village of Taholah and the Village of Queets. Both villages have been significantly harmed, and continue to be threatened further, by environmental impacts. As a result, we are in the process of relocating these villages to higher ground.

Taholah is in the southern portion of the reservation at the mouth of the Quinault River on the Pacific coast. Taholah consists of two sites known as the "Upper Village" and "Lower Village." The Lower Village is located below sea level and severe weather events and ongoing environmental harms continue to be the greatest threat to the village, our citizens, Quinault government operations, and critical Tribal infrastructure and services.

Already, high tides, high winds, and storm surge conditions have led to waves breaking over the seawall that protects the Lower 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. In the winter of 2022, the Village was again significantly flooded. The flood caused widespread damage and spurred the evacuation of a dozen residential homes and seven government buildings including our courthouse, community center, post office, and community services office spaces.

In previous years we have testified on how our Tribe formulated a Taholah Village Relocation Master Plan to govern the Village's relocation. The Master Plan was adopted by the Quinault Indian Nation Business Committee on June 26, 2017. Since then, we have been building and executing on the vision of the Master Plan, which incorporates community member input and addresses long-term stewardship, cultural beliefs, and improved community facilities.

I am happy to report to the Subcommittee that the relocation efforts continue to move forward to completion. However, we still have many months of work ahead of us. We have also initiated the relocation process for the Village of Queets. Quinault has identified and secured land for the relocation, finalized the Queets Relocation Master Plan, and is preparing to commence development soon.

To continue the process of relocating Taholah Village and Queets Village to higher ground, our Tribe will need additional funding. Because of the urgent need to expedite the relocation of all coastal Tribal villages, we ask the Subcommittee to increase funding to the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program to \$50 million in FY 2026. This funding will ensure that Quinault and other coastal Tribes have the means to move their populations to safer areas as soon as possible.

Murdered and Missing Indigenous People

The epidemic of murdered and missing indigenous people represents a profound and ongoing failure by the federal government to uphold its trust and treaty obligations to Native Nations. This crisis, rooted in systemic underfunding and neglect, was starkly highlighted in the 2018 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights report, "Broken Promises: Continuing Federal Funding Shortfall for Native Americans." The report found that the federal government has consistently failed to meet its commitments, leaving Native communities without adequate resources to address critical issues, including public safety, victim advocacy, and justice services. These shortcomings perpetuate cycles of violence and disproportionately impact Indigenous women, children, and families.

To address this epidemic, we respectfully urge the Subcommittee to prioritize programs that are essential to combating the murdered and missing indigenous people crisis, including:

- Increased funding for Tribal police departments to enhance law enforcement capacity and improve response times,
- Support for programs dedicated to Native victims of crime, ensuring culturally appropriate services and resources,
- Funding for victim advocates who can provide critical assistance to Native victims of all crimes, and
- The establishment of a national Indian Country clearinghouse on sexual assault, coupled with funding for housing, counseling, and education programs to support survivors and their families.

By addressing these key areas, the federal government can begin to fulfill its trust responsibilities and provide Native communities with the tools they need to combat this devastating epidemic and promote safety, justice, and healing.

Indian Health Services Funding and Advanced Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2027

In 2023, this Subcommittee made historic strides in safeguarding the health and well-being of Tribal communities by securing advanced appropriations for Indian Health Services funding for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. We extend our gratitude to the Members of the Subcommittee for their steadfast commitment to ensuring that healthcare services remain uninterrupted, even during periods of federal funding uncertainty. Advanced appropriations are particularly critical for the Quinault Nation, as past government shutdowns have caused significant disruptions in Indian Health Services for our citizens.

We request that the Subcommittee include advanced appropriations funding for Indian Health Service for fiscal year 2027 at a minimum of \$5.2 billion as part of the fiscal year 2026 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Conclusion

The Quinault Indian Nation remains steadfast in our commitment to protecting our citizens, lands, and culture from the adverse impacts of systemic underfunding, environmental threats, and violence against indigenous populations. However, we cannot achieve these goals alone. As our trustee, the federal government has a legal and moral obligation to fulfill its treaty commitments and provide the resources necessary for our survival and prosperity.

We respectfully urge the Subcommittee to support the above programs and fully fund the requests outlined in this testimony, which address critical needs for the Quinault people and other Tribal Nations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.