



**Testimony of Chairman Robert de los Angeles Snoqualmie Indian Tribe 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
March 17-18, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am a long-standing Councilmember of the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe (“Snoqualmie”), on the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe’s Tribal Council and currently serving as Chairman. It is an honor to speak before you on behalf of my people and to share the pressing issues confronting our Tribe.

The Sacred Snoqualmie Falls (ṣəqɑłʔdal & sqʷəd)

Snoqualmie Falls and its surrounding lands and waters are rooted in the ancestral heritage of the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe and hold deep sacred significance to our people. The Falls are one of the most sacred places within our lands, central to our history, spirituality, and identity since time immemorial. In recognition of this cultural importance, the Falls is listed as a Traditional Cultural Property on the National Register of Historic Places.

Snoqualmie Falls is a majestic 268-foot waterfall located in the heart of Western Washington State on the Snoqualmie River within my Tribe’s historic homeland. It is more than a natural landmark-it is the heart of our cultural and spiritual identity. In our creation history, the mist from the Falls connects worlds. Prayers are offered and blessings are delivered. Ages-old ceremonial practices continue at sacred Snoqualmie Falls to this day.

Snoqualmie Falls continues to be desecrated by Puget Sound Energy’s (“PSE’s”) hydroelectric plant, which has been in operation since 1898. PSE controls the river flow by diverting water, interrupting the sacred cycle of water completing its journey over the Falls to the plunge pool, where it transforms into sacred mist. This desecration blocks the creation of the mist that carries our prayers to the Creator. Additional impacts to this sacred site include frequent low-flying helicopter tours, which disturb the sanctity of the site, endanger the safety of the estimated two million annual visitors, and interfere with our cultural and religious practices.

Since 2020, low-altitude helicopter and fixed-wing flights have greatly increased over the Snoqualmie Falls. These flights are a desecration to our sacred site, interrupt our religious ceremonies, and adversely impact our cultural resource and adjacent trust land. Despite over three years of engagement and meetings with the FAA and Department of Transportation, they have taken no action to protect our sacred site. Unfortunately, the FAA is the only federal entity with the authority to regulate airspace and protect the Snoqualmie Falls from this desecration.

We have worked diligently with the federal government to ensure that trust responsibilities are upheld and to mitigate these grave harms, yet these efforts have fallen short. We ask the Subcommittee to include funding in the FY 2027 bill for sacred site protection that would give the Bureau of Indian Affairs the ability to assist Tribes in defending and preserving their sacred sites. We further urge the Subcommittee to support the establishment of a pilot program and an interagency federal task force, including the Department of the Interior, Department of Transportation, Federal Aviation Administration, and other relevant agencies, to study threats to Tribal sacred sites and work collaboratively with Tribal



Nations to aggressively implement protections for these irreplaceable places. Lastly, I encourage every member of this Subcommittee to visit sacred Snoqualmie Falls, to experience its majesty, and to understand the gravity of what the Snoqualmie Tribe is fighting to protect.

Rescission of the EPA Endangerment Finding and Potential Impacts

The Tribe is deeply concerned by the Environmental Protection Agency's ("EPA's") February 12, 2026, final rule rescinding the 2009 Greenhouse Gas Endangerment Finding and repealing greenhouse gas emission standards for light-, medium-, and heavy-duty on-highway vehicles and engines. Because the 2009 Endangerment Finding served as the legal prerequisite for regulating greenhouse gas emissions from new motor vehicles under the Clean Air Act, its rescission means the Agency no longer views itself as having statutory authority to regulate those emissions and has therefore removed all related federal greenhouse gas requirements for highway engines and vehicles, including obligations for their measurement, control, and reporting.

Tribal Nations are already experiencing the effects of climate change on Tribal lands and resources, including impacts to fisheries, forests, water systems, wildlife, and culturally significant landscapes that support Tribal communities. The removal of these federal standards also creates uncertainty for Tribal governments investing in long-term climate infrastructure planning and natural resource management, as well as for federal, state, and private funding streams tied to greenhouse gas emissions and related EPA standards.

For these reasons, the Snoqualmie Tribe urges Congress to carefully examine the implications of this action for Tribal communities. In particular, the Tribe respectfully asks the Subcommittee to direct a study or oversight review of the potential impacts of rescinding the Endangerment Finding on Tribal lands, resources, and communities, including effects on Tribal natural resource management, infrastructure planning, economic development, and access to federal funding programs tied to greenhouse gas standards. Ensuring that these impacts are fully understood will help Congress and federal agencies better account for the unique vulnerabilities and legal responsibilities affecting Tribal Nations.

Indian Health Service Funding and Medicaid Reforms Impacting the Tribe

The federal government's obligation to provide healthcare to American Indian and Alaska Native people is among the most fundamental duties arising from the trust relationship between the United States and Tribal Nations. It is rooted in treaties, statutes, and centuries of established policy, not in the generosity of any particular Administration or Congress. Yet that obligation is now under greater financial strain than at any point in recent memory, and the Snoqualmie Tribe urges this Subcommittee to act decisively to protect it.

The FY 2026 Indian Health Service ("IHS") budget has been a source of serious concern throughout the appropriations process. The Administration's initial budget proposal sought to slash nearly 30 percent from IHS's base funding, a reduction of approximately \$900 million, while also eliminating advance appropriations, halting funding for healthcare and sanitation facility construction, and restricting Tribal self-governance opportunities. National tribal health advocates warned that these cuts would lead to clinic closures, the loss of essential clinical staff, and preventable deaths in Tribal communities. The proposed budget also sought to eliminate or consolidate foundational programs including Tribal Behavioral Health Grants, the Native Connections suicide prevention program, Good Health and Wellness



in Indian Country, and the Food is Medicine program that provides access to traditional foods, all programs that address the disproportionate health burdens borne by Native people.

The Tribe acknowledges the bipartisan action taken by this Subcommittee and the Senate to resist those proposed cuts. The FY 2026 Interior and Environment minibus signed into law on January 23, 2026, provides \$8.05 billion for IHS, a meaningful rejection of the Administration's proposed reductions, along with \$5.31 billion in advance appropriations for FY 2027. We are grateful for that outcome, and we urge the Subcommittee to build on it. Stable, predictable funding through advance appropriations is not a budgetary accommodation, it is a structural necessity for Tribal health systems. IHS remains the only federal healthcare provider without a guaranteed year-to-year funding stream, and the recurring cycle of government shutdowns and continuing resolutions has repeatedly jeopardized care for our community members at precisely the moments they can least afford disruption.

Beyond appropriations, the Tribe closely monitored the Medicaid provisions included in H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, signed into law on July 4, 2025. That legislation imposes new community engagement requirements, commonly referred to as work requirements, on Medicaid expansion adults ages 19 to 64, requiring at least 80 hours per month of qualifying work, education, or community service activities to maintain eligibility. The Congressional Budget Office estimated that these requirements will reduce federal Medicaid spending by \$326 billion over ten years and cause millions of people to lose coverage nationally.

The Tribe was encouraged that the enacted legislation includes an exemption for American Indian and Alaska Native individuals who are eligible for services through the Indian health system, including IHS, Tribal health facilities, and Urban Indian Organizations. This exemption is critical. American Indian and Alaska Native people are more than twice as likely as their white counterparts to rely on Medicaid, with roughly 40 percent of the non-elderly Native population covered by the program. Medicaid reimbursements flow back into IHS and Tribal health facilities, directly funding the delivery of care, care the federal government is already obligated to provide. Eroding that coverage would not only harm individual patients; it would undermine the financial viability of the very facilities through which the trust responsibility is carried out.

However, the Tribe remains vigilant about implementation. The law requires the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services ("HHS") to issue interim final rules by June 2026, with state implementation due by January 2027. Whether states operationalize the Tribal exemption correctly, through automated data systems, clear guidance, and adequate outreach, will determine whether Snoqualmie and other Tribal members are effectively protected or, in practice, swept into coverage loss through administrative burden. The Tribe respectfully urges this Subcommittee to conduct robust oversight of CMS's implementation guidance and to ensure that the Tribal exemption is applied correctly and uniformly across all states in which Tribal members reside.

Furthermore, the Tribe notes that other Medicaid changes in the reconciliation law, including modifications to provider tax structures, more frequent eligibility redeterminations, and the shift of Medicaid costs from the federal government to states, may result in states reducing provider payments or narrowing program services in ways that indirectly harm Tribal members, even where direct exemptions exist. The federal government covers 100 percent of Medicaid costs for eligible Tribal citizens who receive care at IHS and Tribal facilities, a reflection of the trust responsibility, and states should not be



permitted to undermine that arrangement. Congress must make clear that state fiscal pressures do not justify cuts to provider payments at IHS or Tribal health facilities.

The Snoqualmie Tribe respectfully requests that this Subcommittee support full, advance-appropriated funding for IHS at levels that reflect the true cost of care and that honor the federal trust responsibility; conduct vigorous oversight of the implementation of Medicaid work requirement exemptions to ensure Tribal members are not inadvertently disenrolled; and protect Medicaid's 100 percent federal matching rate for services provided at Tribal health facilities from any state-level erosion.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. The issues I have outlined are of critical importance to the Snoqualmie Indian Tribe and to Tribes across the nation. We respectfully request that the Subcommittee support our priorities and work with the Administration to ensure that the federal government upholds its trust responsibilities to Tribal Nations. I am happy to answer any questions the Subcommittee members may have.