

Witness Biography For Hearing on H.R. 8286

**Frances G. Charles, Chairwoman
Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe**

September 14, 2022

Frances G. Charles is the Chairwoman of the Tribal Council (also known as the “Business Committee”) of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe (the Tribe), the governing body of the Tribe. As Chairwoman, she is the highest-ranking elected official of the Tribe and has served in this position for the past nineteen years, having been elected by the membership each year. She has been elected to a continuous series of three-year terms on the Tribal Council since 1993.

Chairwoman Charles has a deep commitment to the traditional cultural life of the Elwha people. Since the age of eleven, she has been involved with every major cultural and natural resources protection, preservation, and restoration effort of the Tribe. During her time in elected office, Chairwoman Charles has led the Elwha Tribe’s most significant efforts to restore and protect natural and cultural resources of critical importance to the Tribe, and to the public at large. She led the effort to remove the Elwha River dams, and has an intimate knowledge of the profound impacts of those dams, and of their removal, on the Tribe, its culture, and economy. For her work on this, in 2012 she was honored as Conservationist of the Year by the Northwest Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration.

In addition, beginning in 2003, Chairwoman Charles played a leading role in the protection and preservation of the ancient Tse-whit-zen Village and tribal cemetery site along Port Angeles Harbor when it was disturbed by a major excavation for a dry dock project. For this work she received the Woman of the Year Award from Washington Senator Cantwell in 2009 and the Woman of Valor Award for Community Leadership from Washington Governor Gregoire in 2010.

Chairwoman Charles is eternally grateful to the Ancestors and elders of the Elwha people, and to all previous Elwha Tribal Council members and military veterans for laying the path to be able to complete the Elwha Dam Removal and the protection of Tse-whit-zen. She understands that these efforts are not completed yet, and continues to work toward permanent resolutions. Active in national and regional inter-tribal organizations, such as the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, she remains a strong and active supporter of the annual Tribal Canoe Journeys, as well as the Tribe’s Klallam Language (including in the local public schools), Indian education, and honoring the youth, elders and veterans of the Tribe.

Prior to her service in Elwha tribal government, Chairwoman Charles worked twelve years for the Olympic National Forest on forest fire crews and helicopter management, earning her way to become one of the top woman crew leaders on the Olympic Peninsula.

Chairwoman Charles resides on the Lower Elwha Reservation near Port Angeles, Washington, with her husband Jerry, an Army veteran, of twenty-one years now. She has two children and two grandchildren, and is currently raising two foster children.