



**Testimony of Guy Capoeman
President, 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
May 8, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Guy Capoeman, I am the President of the Quinault Indian Nation's ("Quinault") Business Committee, the elected government of Quinault. I have served as the Tribe's President for the last three years and was recently re-elected as President by our Tribal citizens. Thank you for holding this hearing.

The Quinault Reservation is located on the southwestern corner of the Olympic Peninsula of Washington State and abuts the Pacific Ocean. Our reservation comprises over 200,000 acres and we have over 3,000 tribal members. My testimony today will focus on the following appropriations issues:

1. Increasing funding for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program;
2. Increased Project Eligibility for the Department of Interior Community-Driven Relocation Program
3. Establishing funding to address the unacceptable rates concerning murdered and missing indigenous women in our country; and
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). 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. Since 2021, Quinault has consistently had to supplement inadequate levels of federal funding for numerous programs and needs. My testimony today concerns several specific funding needs to be addressed by the federal government.

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 climate change. As a result, we are in the process of relocating these villages to higher ground.

Taholah is located 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 climate change continues to be the greatest threat to this 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.

Last year we 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 sustainable practices, cultural beliefs, and improved community facilities. I am happy to report to the Subcommittee that 100% of the infrastructure is complete, however we are still working to develop all of the housing in the new Village and working with Taholah School District. We still need to complete all of phase two and phase three, which includes infrastructure and relocation of all government buildings. The estimated cost for completing the remainder of the relocation will be roughly \$24 million.

We have also begun the process of developing a relocation plan for the Village of Queets. Quinault has identified and secured the land for the relocation of Queets, however we are still developing a finalized Queets Relocation Master Plan and have not begun development.

To continue the process of relocating Taholah Village and Queets Village to higher ground, our Tribe needs additional funding. Because of the urgent need to expedite the relocation of coastal Tribal villages, we ask the Subcommittee to increase funding to the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program to \$61 million in fiscal year 2024. This funding will ensure that Quinault and other coastal Tribes can move their populations to safer and higher ground as soon as possible.

Increased Project Eligibility for the Department of Interior Community-Driven Relocation Program

The Quinault Nation was proud to be named one of the Tribes to take part in the newly created Community-Driven Relocation Program pilot program through the Department of Interior. This funding is critically needed as part of the massive Village relocations that are currently underway. The Quinault Nation's hope is that this funding can be available for all Native Nations that face a similar However, we have had some significant issues utilizing the funding in this program due to construction restrictions.

The Quinault Nation requests the Subcommittee include language in the FY 2025 Interior bill that will allow increased eligibility and discretion for relocation projects under the Community-Driven Relocation program.

Murdered and Missing Indigenous People Epidemic

In 2022, 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 as it relates to federal funding. The report determined that the federal government has systematically failed to honor its promises and trust responsibilities.

Although the Honoring Promises to Native Nations Act has not been enacted into law, we request the Subcommittee look into funding many of the programs the Act would create, 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 2026

The Subcommittee took historic action to protect the health and well-being of Tribal people by including advanced Appropriations for IHS funding in fiscal year 2024 and fiscal year 2025. We thank the Subcommittee Members for their commitment to healthcare for Tribal Nations. As you know, these appropriations will help ensure that IHS services provided to Tribal Nations in fiscal year 2025 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 for Tribal citizens.

We request that the Subcommittee include advanced appropriations funding for Indian Health Service for fiscal year 2026 at a minimum of \$5.2 billion as part of the fiscal year 2025 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Conclusion

The Quinault Indian Nation is taking proactive measures to protect our citizens from the adverse impacts of climate change, ensure their safety, and provide a brighter future for our people. However, Quinault cannot achieve these goals alone and requires the federal government to fulfill

its treaty and trust obligations by providing necessary support. The Quinault Indian Nation respectfully requests that the Subcommittee fund the requests outlined in this testimony to address the urgent needs of the Quinault people. Thank you again for allowing me to testify today.