

Lawmakers back recognizing tribes

Washington Times

WASHINGTON — Three of Virginia’s most influential lawmakers came to Capitol Hill on Thursday to lobby in favor of a long-stalled congressional bill that would give federal recognition to six Virginia American Indian tribes.

“This is something we’ve got to rectify,” said Rep. James P. Moran, who testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs along with fellow Democrats Sen. Jim Webb and Gov. Tim Kaine. “This is about their pride and about their heritage and what they leave as a legacy to their children and grandchildren.”

Thursday’s hearing was a milestone in the legislative process for the Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act, which Mr. Moran initially introduced in 1999 but had not been passed by a congressional chamber until the House approved a version in May of last year.

The bill would provide federal recognition for the Chickahominy, Chickahominy Eastern Division, Monacan Indian Nation, Nansemond, Rappahannock and Upper Mattaponi tribes, allowing them to compete for educational funds and other grants, as well as health care benefits open to federally recognized tribes.

Tribes typically achieve federal recognition through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which recognizes more than 560 tribes in the country. The bureau’s criteria includes a provision that tribes prove they have been identified as “an American Indian entity on a substantially continuous basis since 1900.”

During the hearing, Mr. Kaine said Virginia’s Racial Integrity Act of 1924 — which forced Indians to identify themselves as “colored” and led to the destruction and alteration of genealogical records — makes the BIA process virtually impossible for the six tribes.

Mr. Moran called the law’s effects a “paper genocide.” Mr. Kaine said the Virginia tribes face added difficulties because they signed peace treaties with the English and integrated into society in the 1600s, before the United States existed.

Said Mr. Webb: “It’s almost impossible for this situation to be resolved through the regular BIA process.”

Committee members also considered efforts by tribes elsewhere in the country to obtain federal recognition. But the hearing came one day before Congress’ expected adjournment, leaving little hope for the Virginia measure’s passage this year.

Sen. Byron L. Dorgan, North Dakota Democrat and committee chairman, said he called the session in hopes that the committee “will take action and make decisions” early next year.

Wayne Adkins, an assistant chief with the Chickahominy tribe and president of the Virginia Indian Tribal Alliance for Life, which has lobbied for the bill’s passage, said he was encouraged by the hearing and the chairman’s comments.

“To me it sounds like we are on the right path, and if we stick with it, we should be successful,” Mr. Adkins said.

In his closing remarks to the committee, Mr. Kaine stressed how the tribes have contributed to Virginia by attending the state’s schools, working in the state’s fields and factories and fighting in the country’s wars.

“They have become part of us,” he said. “It just strikes me that that’s worth something, that that has a value and that there ought to be an acknowledgement of these hundreds of years of living peacefully.”

Tribe hopes to re-create ancestral Tse-whit-zen village

By Jim Casey
Peninsula Daily News

PORT ANGELES, Wash. — Deep inside a Cold War-era building where bare lights shine on a stained concrete floor, a tomb stands empty.

Sturdily built wooden racks which once held more than 300 handmade cedar boxes are bare, the racks’ burdens buried Sept. 14 and Sept. 15 at Tse-whit-zen.

The boxes hold the intact and isolated remains of persons who once lived in the crook of Ediz Hook.

Meanwhile at that ancestral village and cemetery, members of the Lower Elwha Klallam tribe plan to continue leveling the site of the former Hood Canal Bridge graving yard on Marine Drive in Port Angeles.

Then they’ll landscape it with grass and flowering native plants.

“We want it to look like a nice, kept-up cemetery,” Tribal Council member Russell Hepfer said.

Eventually, the Lower Elwha plan to build a cultural center and museum on land it leases at low cost from the state at 1507 Marine Drive.

Ultimately, they’d re-create Tse-whit-zen as it stood before it was razed for a sawmill early in the last century.

It is the biggest Native American village found in the state since the Ozette village, once inhabited by the Makah, was unearthed in the mid-

1970s.

The tribe has no set schedule for the projects.

“It’s not ‘Indian time,’” Hepfer said.

“It’s when everything is ready.”

Rewriting history

A resurrected Tse-whit-zen would be the peak of a climb the tribe began when human remains were found at the site.

The Lower Elwha say they’re rewriting history.

“By utilizing what we have, rediscovering it, we’re changing the Columbus account that I grew up on,” said Tribal Chairwoman Frances Charles.

“We have that opportunity to change the curriculums, to talk about our history, from kindergarten all the way up to the college level.”

The journey isn’t one the Lower Elwha wanted to start in August 2003. That’s when graving yard contractors dug into the 2,700-year-old Klallam village.

Although crews began finding artifacts and human bones within weeks, the project was not shut down until December 2004, after a tense, emotional clash of cultures involving the tribe, the city of Port Angeles and state and federal transportation managers.

“If we could have done what we needed to do, none of us would have been faced with the realities we’ve dealt with,” Charles said.

“If our people had the capa-

bility and laws we have now [that protect Native American cemeteries], our ancestors never would have allowed that to happen.”

Besides leveling and landscaping, the Lower Elwha say they still have lots to do at Tse-whit-zen.

“We have so many more of the piles we have to screen through,” Charles said about the tarpaulin-covered mounds of earth that stand around the 22½ acres.

Even the dirt with which the cedar caskets were covered bore fragmentary remains, she said.

“It will take I don’t know how many years to go through the piles that have high probability, medium probability and low probability of isolates and artifacts,” Hepfer said.

The Lower Elwha don’t voice any pleasure over stopping the state Department of Transportation from completing with the graving yard.

It would have built huge concrete components to retrofit the east end of the Hood Canal Bridge.

Businesses lent help

When the state left Tse-whit-zen in 2005, it had spent about \$87 million without producing any anchors or pontoons.

The work was shifted to yards in Seattle and Tacoma, and components for future bridge repairs will be built in Grays Harbor County.

Despite the anger that

greeted the tribe’s terminating the project, local businesses sold tools for the reburial — shovels, wheelbarrows and other equipment to the tribe at reduced prices.

“I really want to say thanks,” Charles said. “The local businesses have really stepped forward.”

And the tribe is proud that it emerged from the controversy with what it wanted: To return the ancestors to their final resting place.

“We could take care of all he wrongs, all he disturbances over the years, all the mills, all the digging them up and throwing them back,” said Tribal Council member Phil Charles.

“It brought us as a community together to a conclusion to take care of our ancestors and not allow them to be disturbed anymore.”

‘Tribe can do anything’

Added Hepfer, “I believe this tribe can do anything. It shows other tribes that they can step up and do things too.

The experience also illustrated the Native American maxim that decisions should be made to benefit the next seven generations.

By one calculation, that’s as much time as has elapsed since the tribe signed the Treaty of Point No Point in 1855.

“A lot of our ancestors have taken that path for us,” Francis

Charles said.

“We’re following their footsteps. Those that are down there [at Tse-whit-zen] are the ones who started those things for us.”

For now, the Lower Elwha Klallam will consider what they’ll do with Tse-whit-zen once the site is regraded.

“It’s going to be a place we’ll be able to visit with our ancestors,” Frances Charles said.

Resurrecting the village

They also want to recreate their ancestors’ home.

“We have a lot of preparation for what we visualize as a village down there, to reconstruct what the village would have looked like.

“We all have a mental picture of how we’d like to see it, but we have to collaborate with everybody’s thoughts.”

“These are things we want to design so we can show our kids and our community.

“We’ll be able to show we exist. There’s people [in Clallam County] who still don’t know we have a reservation.”

The wooden racks that once held cedar caskets will be put to no other use, unless they become tables in a ceremony where a meal would be set for the ancestors. Then table and food would be burned.

At the former AT&T building where the cedar boxes were stored, “you see empty racks,” Frances Charles said.

Utes, Colo. agree on hunting rights

DURANGO, Colo. (AP) — Ute Indians would be allowed to hunt and fish year-round on ancestral lands under an agreement the tribe has made with Colorado officials.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Southern Ute Indian Tribe have signed agreements on the fishing and hunting rights.

The Brunot Agreement includes nine counties, four national forests and the towns of Lake City, Telluride, Pagosa Springs and Cortez.

The pact dates to an 1874 agreement between the Southern Utes, Ute Mountain Utes and the federal government. The agreement hasn’t been exercised until now and currently involves only the Southern Utes.

Under the agreement, which still faces a public review, tribal members can take no more than 5 percent of the licenses issued for bighorn sheep, mountain goats and moose.

Protesting



Associated Press

Lynette Moreno-Hinz gives a speech about Alaska’s Gov. Sarah Palin’s stance on subsistence and Alaska Natives at a Hold Palin Accountable rally organized by Alaskans For Truth, in Anchorage, Alaska, on Saturday. Palin has caused a storm of protest among Alaska Natives who felt ignored when she made appointments to her administration that tended to side with sporting interests over Native hunting rights and has pursued a lawsuit that many Natives say seeks to undermine their ancient traditions.

Comanche ‘Code Talkers’ honored by tribe, city of Lawton

KSWO

LAWTON, Okla. — During World War II, Native American soldiers were a key part of the allies’ success, because the US Military used them to send secret messages in their native language, and it could not be decoded by the enemy. Comanches were one of more than a dozen tribes who participated in the top secret program that employed the “Code Talkers.”

As the official kickoff to the Comanche Nation Fair, the tribe’s museum unveiled an exhibit dedicated to the “Code Talkers.” The “Native Words, Native Warriors” exhibit is a travelling exhibit on loan from the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian in Washington DC. While the artifacts, photographs, and letters pay tribute to all of the “Code Talkers” of the war, the museum is placing special emphasis on

the 17 Comanche men who helped communicate critical messages during the war.

It took a machine up to four hours to transmit and decode a message, but the “Code Talkers” could do it in less than three minutes - their codes were never broken. On Thursday, the Comanche tribe paid tribute to each of their own. As each name was read, a family member accepted a blanket to honor their relative’s service to the country. Vivian Gooday’s brother and cousin were two of the “Code Talkers” “I felt proud...I felt real proud to be there for my brother,” she said. The museum’s exhibit tells the story of the men’s lives in photographs and artifacts depicting what they endured during World War II.

Comanche Tribal Chairman Wallace Coffey says the men show how important indigenous language is. “We have a problem with language in America,”

he said. “Everyone is saying, ‘English only,’ but what they fail to realize is our Indian Nations.

We were born with an original language. We are trying our best to embrace our language. We are trying our best to utilize it in day to day experiences.” The secrets of the “Code Talkers” language were so well kept that the Germans remained puzzled about the code for many years following the war.

Thursday morning the United States House passed Bill 4544 - “The Code Talker Recognition Act” - and it’s now on its way to the senate. The City of Lawton also has declared September 25 “Comanche Code Talker Day.” The “Native Words, Native Warriors” exhibit will be on display at the Comanche Nation Museum through November 30, and the 17th Annual Comanche Nation Fair will continue through Sunday at the Comanche Nation Complex.

Tribes mark Native American Day with many events

By Marcel Honre’
Palm Springs Desert Sun

PALM SPRINGS, Calif. — In the Coachella Valley, the festivities kicked off earlier this week.

On Wednesday, Palm Springs city leaders issued a proclamation honoring the the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

On Thursdays, Native American dancers and storytellers entertained shoppers at the weekly VillageFest in Palm Springs.

And starting today and Saturday, the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum in Palm Springs will exhibit for the first time its Ramona Basket.

Museum executive director Michael Hammond

called it “one of the most important baskets of Southern California Indians.”

In Cabazon, the Morongo Band of Mission Indians’ 18th annual Thunder & Lightning Pow Wow starts today and runs through Sunday. It will take place next to the Morongo Casino.

Pamela Mackey, executive assistant for the event, said Thursday the tribe expected 1,200 participants and up to 40,000 spectators would attend the free, colorful event.

“The elders pass down stories through dance and song to the younger generation,” Mackey explained. “It’s (also) intended for the general public who has not experienced a powwow.”