

**REMARKS AT THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF THE U.S.
COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS**

The Honorable Derek Kilmer, of Washington, in the House of Representatives

Thursday, November 16, 2017

Mr. KILMER. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to include in the Record these remarks I recently made to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights:

I'm standing with Chairman Castro from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in a village called Taholah. It's the lower reservation of the Quinault Indian Nation. The nation's President, Fawn Sharp, takes us up a slight incline as we look out at the Pacific Ocean. "When I was a kid," she says, "The ocean was a football field's length away. Now it's our front porch."

She explains that her village has been there since time immemorial. But in recent years, it has begun to see the threats of rising sea levels and more severe storms--not to mention the threat of tsunami. She points out that village is below sea level--which wasn't a problem in past generations. But now, on numerous occasions, the sea wall has breached and their village has filled up like a bowl.

That story--and the stories of the four other tribes in my district that--as we sit here today are in the process of trying to move to higher ground--deserves to be heard. And it is why I'm grateful to Mr. Castro and to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights for listening.

Billy Frank, a Native American civil rights icon, provided vital direction to those who needed to be heard, who wanted to advocate. He would say, "Tell your story, tell your story." Storytelling is essential for change.

But in order for change to happen, someone needs to hear that story, and listen to the people telling it. Too often, there is no one listening when communities of color or disadvantaged populations tell their story. That's why the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is so important. For 60 years, the US. Commission on Civil Rights has listened. And they've detailed, in sharp focus, the inequity tribal communities across the nation face, in addition to many other injustices.

In a 2003 report called *The Quiet Crisis*, they showed our government's systemic failure to live up to its treaty obligations with tribal communities. I am grateful for the work they're doing to update that report.

I want to tell you another one of the stories we heard. One of the tribal leaders shared his story. He said, "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" I said, "Let's hear the good news!" He said, "Every one of our high schoolers graduated this past year." I said, "So what's the bad news?" He then shared that, for the first time, the state of Washington was requiring that students take the state mandated exam over the internet. He said, "We don't have high speed internet." He said, "We tried a sample test. We shut down every computer

in the school except two.” It's one of those exams where you answer ten questions and then click next page. He said, “We tried it. It took a minute and 44 seconds to get to the next page.” So that's not going to work.

Sadly--that tribe, too, is not alone. Many of the coastal tribes lack the basic broadband that many of us take for granted. It doesn't just create a barrier to first responders, and to folks who want to start a business, or to kids who need to pass a test.

It's a civil rights problem.

According to the FCC approximately 63 percent of Tribal land residents lack access to strong broadband. Only 17 percent of the rest of the nation faces a similar challenge.

This isn't the only challenge tribal communities face. We know they have a higher rate of substance abuse issues than the general population, they have lower graduation rates, they have underfunded schools and police forces and many areas lack the economic development opportunities necessary to provide families with a quality income.

These are real problems, and too often these communities are ignored. But the U.S. Commission on Civil rights is listening. And they're amplifying quiet voices.

I am pleased with the fact that the Commission is working on an update to the Quiet Crisis Report. When it's completed, it can provide a roadmap for Congress and for the Administration to address problems that are too often unnoticed. And the Commission is listening to other communities too.

Your work is a big part of the reason a hate crimes bill recently passed out of the House Judiciary Committee. And your reporting is driving the House's discussion on voting rights.

So let me just end by saying thank you. Thank you all for having me today. Thank you Dr. Hayden and the Library of Congress for curating such a powerful exhibit. On behalf of my constituents, and on behalf of everyone else who is telling their story. Thank you.

And to the Commission--Thank you for listening. Thank you for shining a light on injustice and disparity. And thank you for working to ensure that our nation keeps its promise to all of its citizens.

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From the *Congressional Record*:

<https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2017/11/16/extensions-of-remarks-section/article/e1585-1?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22%5C%22commission+on+civil+rights%5C%22%22%5D%7D&r=1>

