

### New rules may speed tribal repatriations

The federal government has revised the rules that institutions and government agencies must follow to comply with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. This law has long been hampered by limited funding, and the unwillingness of many museums to relinquish Indigenous remains and burial items.

The new regulations should "strengthen the authority and role of Indigenous communities in the repatriation process"

by requiring institutions to defer more to tribes' knowledge of their regions and histories in their decision-making about repatriations," said U.S. Secretary of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, the first Native American to hold a U.S. cabinet position.

Thirty-three years ago, Congress passed the Native graves and repatriation act, or NAGPRA, to prevent grave looting and push museums to return human remains and items excavated from Native American gravesites to tribes.

However, the promise of repatriation that many tribal

nations once saw in the law has not been fully realized, with federal data showing institutions continue to store about half of the 200,000 ancestral remains they reported holding following passage of the 1990 law.

Archaeologists and scientists at some of the nation's top universities and museums have exploited loopholes in NAGPRA to delay or resist turning over holdings reported under the law, according to an investigation by ProPublica.

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