

NATIVE NEWS FROM ACROSS THE NATION

"Kennewick Man" Remains to go to Five Northwest Indian Tribes

The Department of the Interior provided its determination of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that the bones of the 9,000 year old human skeletal remains known as Kennewick Man be given to the five Indian Tribes that have collectively claimed him as their ancient ancestor. The decision was announced in a letter from Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt to the Secretary of the Army Louis Caldera and represents the culmination of a thorough process of scientific examinations and investigations.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers currently is responsible for the skeletal remains, which are now located at the Burke Museum of Natural and Cultural History in Seattle. Under an agreement with the corps, the Interior Department agreed to determine the proper disposition of the remains under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA).

"This is a unique case on so many levels," Babbitt said. "The bones are of great antiquity and were found in the shallows of the Columbia River without an archaeological context. The Department completed a careful, detailed series of scientific investiga-

■ Determination by Interior Secretary follows two years of scientific examination of 9,000 year old skeletal remains.

tions involving world-class experts to learn as much as possible. All that information is now available to anyone, and is posted on the Internet. After evaluating this complex situation, I believe that it is reasonable to determine that the Kennewick Man remains should be transferred to the Tribes that have jointly claimed him — Tribes that have inhabited, hunted and fished this area around the confluence of the Columbia and the Snake Rivers for millennia."

Secretary Babbitt based his determination on two grounds. First, he concluded that the remains were culturally affiliated with the five Tribes making a joint claim. "Although ambiguities in the data made this a close call, I was persuaded by the geographic data and oral histories of the five Tribes that collectively assert they are the descendants of people who have been in the region of the Upper Columbia Plateau for a very long time," Babbitt explained.

Second, Secretary Babbitt concluded that the land adjacent to the river shallows where the more than 380 pieces of bone were found scattered had been determined by the Indian Claims Commission to be the aboriginal land of a number of the five Tribes that are currently claiming the skeletal remains. The land is currently federal land managed by county government as Columbia Park in Kennewick, Washington.

The Department of the Interior reviewed geographical, kinship, biological, archaeological, anthropological, linguistic, oral tradition and historical information to make this determination. All lines of evidence were deemed equally important. Pieces of metacarpal and rib bone were also sent for DNA analysis to three renowned laboratories: Yale University, the University of California at Davis and the University of Michigan. None of the laboratories was able to extract DNA for analysis

due to the antiquity and mineralization of the more than 9,000 year old bone.

"Clearly, when dealing with human remains of this antiquity, concrete evidence is often scanty, and the analysis of the data can yield ambiguous, inconclusive or even contradictory results," Babbitt said. "We worked hard to gather and analyze all information and evidence that might possibly be relevant and these investigations and documentation were essential to my determination. If the remains had been 3,000 years old, there would be little debate over whether Kennewick Man was the ancestor of the Upper Plateau Tribes. The line back to 9,000 years, with relatively little evidence in between, made the cultural affiliation determination difficult."

The Secretary's determination would preclude further study of the remains by the public. His letter and other accompanying documents, scientific expert reports, and radiocarbon and DNA analysis are available on the Department of the Interior's web site, with a web link off the Interior home page or at <http://www.cr.nps.gov/aad/kennewick>.



Photo by Brent Merrill

"Every elected official at every level of government takes an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution. You sometimes wonder if they have read the U.S. Constitution."

~ Elizabeth Furse

Tribes Oppose Sovereignty Challenges

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ernment leaders who question Tribal sovereignty.

"Every elected official at every level of government takes an oath to uphold the U.S. Constitution. You sometimes wonder if they have read the U.S. Constitution," she said.

Furse cited Section 6 of the document, which refers to "all Treaties made, or which shall be made, under the Authority of the United States, shall be the supreme Law of the Land; and the Judges in every State shall be bound thereby, anything in the Constitution or Laws of any State to the Contrary notwithstanding."

Stensgar moderated the discussion. He chose Rankin for the panel because the outspoken commissioner has clashed with Tribal views from time to time.

For example, Rankin believes that Tribal members should be required to pay property taxes on

non-Tribal reservation land. But, Rankin noted, he sided with the Tribe in opposing a nudist resort and a railroad-refueling depot.

Audience member Louis Stone, a Colville Tribal leader, took Rankin to task for his support of an English-only ordinance in Kootenai County, calling it "a personal attack on our culture." The ordinance was approved in 1997.

Rankin responded that he is not opposed to the use of other languages in society, only in government business. Ballots and drivers' licenses should not be printed in multiple languages, he said.

"I advocated official English," Rankin responded. "It (the ordinance) was directed against immigrants who refuse to use this language."

Rankin disagreed with Stone's contention that he was guilty of cultural "ethnic cleansing."

Republicans Attack Process of Federal Recognition for Tribes

WASHINGTON, D.C. (AP) — The federal government should stop recognizing American Indian Tribes for the next six months and investigate the recognition process, a handful of Republican House members said recently.

Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Conn., accused the Clinton administration of letting donations from Tribes and supporters of Tribal groups influence the recognition process.

"The administration is playing fast and loose in this process," Shays said. He refused to give specifics, though he accused officials from the Bureau of Indian Affairs of selectively quoting from experts' opinions to support Tribal recognitions.

"There is a plethora of money that is coming into play and that is distorting the process," Shays said.

Stephanie Hanna, a spokeswoman with the Department of the Interior, which oversees the BIA, called Shays' accusations "absolutely ridiculous." Since 1980, 15 Tribes have received BIA recognition and 15 have been turned down, Hanna said.

"There have been hardly any Tribes recognized during the Clinton administration," said Hanna. "And the ones that have, have gone through an extensive process."

There are currently 227 Tribes seeking federal recognition — 11 of which are in Connecticut. The Paucatuck Easterns and the Eastern

Pequots, both of which claim descent from the historic Eastern Pequot Tribe, each recently won preliminary recognition from the BIA. The federal agency is seeking to determine if those groups, which share a reservation in North Stonington, represent two Tribes or one.

Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va., said there should be a six-month moratorium on recognitions while the process is investigated.

"I want to make sure the process is so sound that you can say, whether you're a member of a Tribe or a member of the outside community, that the process was fair," Wolf said.

Once a Tribe gets federal recognition, it can obtain rights to build a casino.

Wolf said his call for a recognition moratorium is not related to his opposition to a bid by eight Virginia Tribes to win federal recognition.

Hanna said a moratorium is useless because it sometimes takes as long as three years for a Tribe to be recognized. However, she said it's likely there will be a few Tribes that are recognized within the next six months.

Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal has also requested a temporary halt to Tribal recognitions, but BIA Director Kevin Gover told him that a moratorium would be detrimental to the Indian groups seeking federal acknowledgment.

On The Net:

Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians: <http://www.atni.org>