

## Civil Rights Commission issues report on federal government's failure to adequately fund its Native treaty responsibilities

By Dean Rhodes

*Smoke Signals editor*

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a report on the federal government's continuing lack of commitment to fund programs for Native Americans in December, calling the current funding "grossly inadequate" to meet the most basic needs the federal government is obligated to provide.

The report, titled "Broken Promises," updates the commission's 2003 report "A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country."

"Unfortunately, the current study reflects that the efforts undertaken by the federal government in the past 15 years have resulted in only minor improvements, at best, for the Native population as a whole," states the executive summary included in "Broken Promises." "And, in some respects, the U.S. government has backslid in its treatment of Native Americans."

Both reports evaluated budgets and spending of the more than 20 federal agencies that sponsor Native American programs, and both reports found the federal government sorely lacking in living up to its trust responsibilities.

In fiscal year 2019, the federal government requested \$20 billion for programs serving Tribes and Native American communities,

which was a decrease from fiscal year 2018's \$22 billion enacted funding level and a slight increase from the fiscal year 2017 enacted funding level of \$19.9 billion.

The current report also found that the overall budget of the Indian Health Service meets slightly more than 50 percent of the health care needs of Native Americans who suffer "striking health deficiencies and disparities."

"The crisis the commission found in 2003 remains, and the federal government continues to fail to support adequately the social and economic well-being of Native Americans," says Commission Chair Catherine E. Lhamon in a letter addressed to President Donald Trump, Vice President Mike Pence and outgoing Speaker of the House Paul Ryan. "Due at least in part to the failure of the federal government adequately to address the well-being of Native Americans over the last two centuries, Native Americans continue to rank near the bottom of all Americans in health, education and employment outcomes."

According to the report, Native Americans are more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed, experience rape or abuse, and be killed by police than any other ethnic or racial group. In addition, Native Americans have 1.6 times the in-

fant mortality rate of non-Hispanic whites and the life expectancy of Native peoples is 5.5 years less than the national average.

The commission's key findings, however, did not all revolve around funding shortfalls. It also found that federal programs for Native Americans are sometimes inefficiently structured and that the federal government fails to keep accurate, consistent and comprehensive records of federal spending on Native American programs "making monitoring of federal spending to meet its trust responsibility difficult."

The commission encouraged Congress to honor the federal government's trust obligations outlined in 375 treaties by passing a spending package that fully addresses the unmet needs in Indian Country and targeting the most critical needs for immediate investment.

"This spending package should also address the funding necessary for the buildout of unmet essential utilities and core infrastructure needs in Indian Country, such as electricity, water, telecommunications and roads," Lhamon said. "The federal government should provide steady, equitable and non-discretionary funding directly to Tribal nations to support the public safety, health care, education, housing and economic development of Native Tribes and people."

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent bipartisan agency established by Congress in 1957 that is, in part, directed to study and collect information relating to discrimination or a denial of equal protection. The update of "A Quiet Crisis" was requested by 20 members of the U.S. House of Representatives in May 2015.

In 2016, commission members visited the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes in Wyoming, the Quinault Reservation in Washington state, the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota and the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, as well as accepted comments from Tribes, Tribal leaders and other interested parties.

According to the 2016 American Community Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau, 5.5 million people identify as Native American or Alaska Native either alone or in combination with one or more other races.

"The United States expects all nations to live up to their treaty obligations," Lhamon said. "It should live up to its own."

The full 314-page report, which addresses criminal justice and public safety, health care, education, housing and economic development in dedicated chapters, can be found at the commission's website at [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov). ■

## 'It's been a fantastic experience'

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from front page

board member with 17 years. She resigned after becoming Oregon governor in 2015.

During its 21-year existence, the fund has given away \$79.28 million to Oregon nonprofits.

Dozono is a 64-year resident of Portland and has been married to wife Loen for 50 years. The couple has five children and Dozono has been active much of his life in the nonprofit sector.

He jokes that giving away "other peoples' money" is "the best job he's ever had."

"It's been a fantastic experience, but it's time for me to make room for a younger person to serve as chair," Dozono said after the Community Fund's fourth-quarter check distribution held in the Governance Center on Wednesday, Dec. 12. "I've really enjoyed working with Tribal members and trustees to figure out the grants, and meeting the people who do all of the nonprofit work."

Spirit Mountain Community Fund serves as the philanthropic arm of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, using 6 percent of proceeds from Spirit Mountain Casino to distribute grants to nonprofit organizations in 11 northwest Oregon counties, government agencies in Polk and Yamhill counties, and the nine federally recognized Oregon Tribes.

On Wednesday, Dec. 12, Dozono

also enjoyed a lunch in his honor at Spirit Mountain Casino, shortly before awarding 27 grants worth \$670,000 during the Community Fund's fourth-quarter check presentation.

Community Fund Executive Director Mychal Cherry said Dozono is a natural leader with a great sense of humor.

"As the newly appointed executive director almost two years ago, Sho took me under his wing and encouraged me to do my best," she said. "I appreciated his enthusiasm and that his heart was always in the right place."

Cherry added that Dozono is passionate about the health and well-being of Oregonians, and improving the lives of the disadvantaged.

"The staff will be forever grateful for his 21 years of service and leadership as an ambassador of Spirit Mountain Community Fund and Tribe," she said. "hayu masi, Sho."

Dozono, a former high school teacher, is well-known for his sense of humor and "quizzes" during Community Fund check presentations, where he queries recipients about details of a video highlighting the Tribe's history shown before each event.

"I'll really miss thanking the people that do the job on behalf of all of us," he said. "I've always said, over and over like a broken record, that this is the best job I have ever had. ... I won't go away completely.

I can still be a resource to people who apply for grants."

The retired owner of Azumano Travel and once-mayoral candidate in Portland has a long history of community service.

In 1996, he organized a 30,000-person march in support of Portland Public Schools funding. He also was a founding member of the Portland Schools Foundation in 1994, now All Hands Raised. Additionally, Dozono was the first minority chair of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and also has served as chair of the Oregon League of Minority Voters. He was also a board chair for United Way and a member of the Japanese American Citizens League.

Currently, Dozono serves as a Portland State University trustee as well as working on the New Portland Policy Commission, which advised the Portland City Council on immigrant and refugee issues.

"As chair of the Community Fund board, I brought the perspective of being connected with Portland nonprofits and my experience there," Dozono said. "The Community Fund was one of the most important nonprofits I have worked for and hopefully I had an impact."

During the Dec. 12 check presentation ceremony, that impact was apparent when Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George and Tribal Lands Department Manager Jan Looking Wolf Reibach performed an honor song for Dozono, much to

his surprise.

"That made me feel really emotional," he said.

Tribal Council member Kathleen George is also a former director of the Community Fund and served in the position for five years. She said one of Dozono's biggest accomplishments was working with the board to seek diversity amongst grant applicants.

"In addition to considering funding requests, the board thought about the bigger picture and saw the opportunity to direct us to work with nonprofits to promote equity and diversity," George said.

She said one of her favorite aspects of working with Dozono is how involved he was as board chair.

"Sho almost always made it a point to attend our presentations," she said. "That was a wonderful thing. It's a brief time that brings everyone together, a true moment of community. He was always a big part of it."

George said she will miss Dozono's "quizzes" during check presentations the most.

"He created a fun opportunity to share important information about the Tribe," she said.

Dozono credits Tribal members for allowing their Tribal Council to create the fund in 1997.

"They have given away more than \$79 million," he said. "Serving for 21 years has really been a privilege, a pleasure and an honor for me." ■