

Statement of Chairwoman Wena Supernaw
Chairwoman, Quapaw Nation
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related
Agencies
May 7, 2024

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to be here to speak to you about the priorities and needs of the Quapaw Nation. My name is Wena Supernaw and I serve as elected Chairperson of the Nation.

I am here today on behalf of our nearly 6,000 enrolled citizens to ask that you help close a dark chapter in our history.

Shortly after the establishment of our Reservation up through the 1960s, our trustee, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, allowed our natural resources to be plundered. The mining activities conducted on our lands produced more than 50% of the lead and zinc used to defend the United States during World War I and from 1917 through 1947 over \$20 billion of ore was extracted from our lands.

They then allowed the plunderers to dump the waste on our land. BIA's actions not only destroyed our ability to use the Reservation, they also poisoned it for generations.

Our pleas for justice fell on deaf ears for more than 100 years. But finally, in 2012, a Congressman from the State of Oklahoma with a deep understanding of our history stepped in. I am incredibly grateful that this outstanding champion

for Indian Country, Congressman Tom Cole, now has the distinguished honor of chairing this very committee.

Congressman Cole's legislation gave the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants the ability to seek restitution from the United States in the U.S. Court of Federal Claims for the damages alleged in the case of *Thomas Charles Bear, et al., v. United States*.

With the support of our Nation, our co-claimants, and the U.S. Department of Justice, on January 9, 2020 the Court entered a historic settlement of the *Bear* case. The Court recommended that the Nation and our co-claimants receive \$137,500,000 in compensation for the damages. This funding would help us address the generations of damage to our land and trauma to our people.

Sadly, I am here today because more than four years later, the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants have not seen a dime.

- We have not seen a dime even though more than \$20 Billion in Lead and Zinc deposits were removed from our land by without our permission.
- We have not seen a dime even though portions of our Reservation are so geologically unstable that garbage trucks cannot drive on certain roads out of a fear they may collapse into ubiquitous mines authorized by the Bureau.

- We have not seen a dime from our settlement even though the piles of toxic mining waste that still sit on our reservation are some of the tallest man-made structures that exist for miles.
- We have not seen a dime even though the Quapaw people have lived in and next to the Tar Creek Superfund site, one of the most toxic sites in the country.

Congress, in fact this very Committee, can help us turn the page. I ask that you join the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants in asking the U.S. to finally live up to its trust and treaty responsibilities. An appropriation to settle the *Bear* case will not undo all the damage, but it will help us move forward.

Thank you and I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today.