

Statement of Chairwoman Wena Supernaw  
Chairwoman, Quapaw Nation  
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related  
Agencies  
February 26 2025

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify again on behalf of the Quapaw Nation. My name is Wena Supernaw and I am the Chairperson of the Nation.

Once again, I am here today to ask that the United States, through this Committee, help close a dark chapter in our Nation's history.

Almost immediately after the establishment of our Reservation, up through the 1960s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs oversaw the systematic removal of virtually all valuable natural resources from our reservation. The Bureau authorized mines on our land that, from 1917 to 1947 alone, produced more than \$20 billion worth of lead and zinc. Our tribe hardly saw a dime.

The pillaging of our resources alone was devastating, but that's not even the worst of it. The Bureau's haphazard authorization of mines was so shoddy that now much of the land on our Reservation—in fact the entire of Picher, OK—is so undermined that it is unsafe for habitation.

That's still not all. The BIA also authorized the mining companies to dump their toxic waste on our farms and on our fields. Some of these piles are 80 or 90 feet high!

The Bureau of Indian Affairs didn't just allow our resources to be stolen, they also allowed our Reservation to be poisoned 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 introduced legislation that 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*.

We had a historic opportunity and worked diligently with the co-claimants and the United States to come to an agreement, and 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 five years later, the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants have not been made whole. But we persist.

After months of work and negotiation with our co-claimants, we reached agreement on legislation that would authorize the U.S. to fulfil its end of the

bargain and provide funding the Court determined we are owed.

Senators Mullin and Lankford, as well as your colleague Congressman Josh Brecheen introduced legislation to fulfill this important obligation. And;

Now we are here to ask that you work with our Congressional Delegation to help our nation recover from the losses we have suffered and will continue to suffer for years to come because of the BIA's mismanagement of our lands.

I ask that you join the Quapaw Nation and our co-claimants in demanding 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.