
TESTIMONY OF FRANK HARRISON
Councilman, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
in support of H.R. 3885
Before the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee
October 18, 1983

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

My name is Frank Harrison, my address is Star Route 1, Box 13, Grand Ronde, Oregon, and I am a council member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde Indians. I want to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to appear before you. I would like to tell you some of the effects of termination on our tribe.

As you know termination as a policy has been repudiated by the United States Congress since 1968 but my tribe remains terminated. In 1975 the American Indian Policy Review Commission Task Force 10 studied the effects of termination on Oregon tribes -- the report had this to say:

The effects of termination have been disastrous from the standpoint of the Klamath and Western Oregon Indians.

.....

It is our conclusion that the decision to terminate the Klamath and Western Oregon Indians from federal supervision was an ill-advised decision unsupported by objective evidence and carried out without the consent or understanding of those affected.

The idea behind termination was for Indian people and tribes to become self-sufficient by assimilating into the white society; to compete with white people and thus to learn to advance ourselves.

The concept was that termination would have a positive effect on the Grand Ronde Tribe.

The facts however show that the opposite happened. Termination caused great hardship to our tribe and our people are still suffering because of it.

In 1982 the tribal council decided we must document the conditions of our members and we hired a firm in McMinnville, Oregon to conduct a socio-economic study. I would like to enter this study into the record of this hearing. This study shows that the Grand Ronde Indians are lagging behind their white neighbors in health, employment and education.

I would like, Mr. Chairman, to read to you some of the findings of this report.

25% of tribal members suffer from chronic health problems.

24% are in need of medical attention but cannot afford it.

51% have dental care needs which are not being met.

The tragic irony of this is that not far from Grand Ronde is the Indian Health Services facility at Chemawa Indian School. This is a modern efficient facility but our people cannot make use of its services because we are terminated and are no longer federally recognized Indians.

I would like to draw your attention to a letter sent to Chairman Udall from Dr. Ruth Jens who served as a physician with the Grand Ronde people while she worked for the Department of the Interior. In the letter she states:

I can personally attest to their using medical services provided by the the Department of the Interior . . . After termination, Indian families continued to live in the Grand Ronde area and were considered a 'tribe' by other residents of the area. Long after my employment with the Department of the Interior, I saw people of the Indian population who continued to live at Grand Ronde and sought my services on their own.

In 1982 the average unemployment figure for all Oregonians was 11.3%, a very high figure. For Grand Ronde Indians unemployment stands at 37.6%.

Our people are dropping out of school and are finding themselves unemployable. Only 52% of tribal members finish high school compared to the statewide rate of 75%. Termination cut off the opportunity for tribal members to compete for Indian scholarship funds, to enter Indian schools or to participate in Johnson-O'Malley programs.

Because all land except our burial grounds was sold at termination, our tribe has had no opportunity until this last two years, to develop economic programs which would provide employment and growth to our tribe. [A hidden cost of termination has been the inability of our tribe to participate in the era of Indian Self-Determination. When President Nixon repudiated termination and Congress followed with the Indian Self-Determination Act of 1975, a new era began for tribes. However my tribe, along with other terminated tribes, was unable to participate for we were already terminated.]

But the greatest loss has been our sense of identity. The loss of federal recognition affected the unity of the tribe.

Some people moved away. I remember going to other reservations and having Indian people ask me what tribe I was from and having them not know "Grand Ronde". This happened to me many times when I was growing up and still does today. This would not have happened if our tribe had been a federally recognized tribe perhaps.

Our tribe has made every effort since termination to meet the needs of our members. Our tribe has successfully sought grants from private foundations and the Administration for Native Americans. I am employed in our Greenhouse where we grow vegetable plant starts which we sell to the public. The mature vegetables, such as tomatoes, lettuce and cabbages, are sold to local restaurants. What's left is distributed to the tribal elderly and needy. This industry is small, but it is growing.

I also do the liaison with the Forest Service in our Jam and Jelly project, in which wild huckleberries are picked and made into jam and jelly. A Comprehensive Feasibility Study was required by the Siuslaw National Forest before they could do an Environmental Assessment Study and lease five acres to the tribe. The studies were completed and the tribe now has a lease with the Forest Service to use the five acres for berry picking. We intend to develop these projects in a responsible manner so they they will continue to provide assistance to our people.

In seven ratified treaties our tribes ceded to the United States hundreds of thousands of prime acres, making that land available for white settlement; in return the United States agreed to provide health, education and economic development services; the United States agreed to protect our people; the United States recognized our sovereignty. Our tribes have abided by the laws of Congress and we have kept our treaty promises. We never consented to being terminated and yet termination unilaterally abrogated many of the promises made by the United States to our tribe. We ask today that Congress close the gap of twenty-nine years and restore our tribe to its former status. I urge that you approve H.R. 3885.

Thank you.