

Senate Passes Bill to Move Quileute Tribe Out of Tsunami Zone

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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Washington D.C. - On Monday the Senate passed legislation backed by U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) that enables the Quileute Tribe to move to higher ground, away from the danger of a Pacific tsunami and persistent Quillayute River flooding. The bill, [H.R. 1162](#), passed the U.S. House of Representatives on Monday, February 6, and passed the Senate tonight by unanimous consent. It now goes to the President for his signature. Congressman Norm Dicks (D-WA-06) is the primary sponsor of the legislation in the House, and Cantwell, a member of the Indian Affairs Committee, is the primary sponsor of the legislation (S.636) in the Senate. Sen. Cantwell and Rep. Dicks [introduced](#) the legislation in the Senate and House on March 17, 2011. When the tragic tsunami hit Japan last March, and when a recent earthquake in just the last few weeks hit off Vancouver Island, it sent another urgent message and a wake-up call to hurry to get this legislation passed Congress - Senator Cantwell

Cantwell continued Monday on the Senate floor. **“Now with the one year anniversary of the tragedy less than one month away we have finally done our job. With the passage of the bill tonight the Quileute can finally begin to move out of the flood zone. I’d like to thank Congressman Norm Dicks for his help in making this a reality.”**

Cantwell continued: **“It is important in times like this that Congress does act. That we break gridlock and move forward. And for the Quileute tribe, a tribe that gained much national notoriety in a recent movie series, what’s really important is not that notoriety but the fact today that people have come together to help them move to safer grounds.”**The Quileute Tribal Reservation consists of one square mile of land, surrounded by the Olympic National Park with many steep, unbuildable areas. As a result, the tribe’s school, offices and homes are located right against the ocean, putting lives and property in grave danger if a catastrophic tsunami were to occur. The legislation passed today enables the tribe to relocate out of the tsunami flood zone. **“I am so excited to hear the news today about the passage of the bill!”** said Quileute Chairman Tony Foster. **“I am overwhelmed with emotions and so grateful that our tribe will actually be able to move our elders and children out of the path of a tsunami and up to higher ground. Our tribal school, senior center, administrative offices and elders situated in the lower village, will all benefit from the passage of this legislation. Our sincerest appreciation to Senator Cantwell for all the hard work she put behind the passage of this legislation. We also want to thank the National Park Service for their work on the settlement that led to the legislation. To all the tribal members who have worked tirelessly on this legislation for many decades, we hold you in our hearts today as we humbly share with the world that our prayers have been answered.”**The legislation passed today authorizes the transfer of appropriate tracts of higher elevation land from Olympic National Park, which borders the Quileute Tribal Reservation, enabling the tribe to relocate out of a flood zone. These tracts would be added to the reservation to form a contiguous area upon which the tribe’s school, a daycare center, the elder center, tribal government offices, and several tribal members’ homes could be constructed. **“For decades the Quileute tribe in the Pacific Northwest has waited for a chance to move out of the tsunami zone that they are in**

and into safety,” Cantwell said today on the Senate floor. **“And every day 80 students go to a school and a school-house that is just one foot above sea level. And every day they look directly out the window at the roaring waves of the powerful ocean. And wonder when they can move to safer, higher ground.”**Representing years of work by stakeholders, the legislation also settles, by mutual agreement, a longstanding dispute between the Olympic National Park and the tribe over the northern boundary of the reservation. In addition, the bill guarantees public access to Rialto Beach and Second Beach on the Washington coast where public access has been threatened by the long-running dispute between the tribe and the national park. At an Indian Affairs [hearing](#) on April 14, 2011, the Department of the Interior added its backing to Cantwell’s Quileute tsunami protection legislation. Also at the April 14 hearing, Bonita Cleveland, former chair of the Quileute Nation, explained how there is only one road that connects the lower village to higher ground, and it is often buried under several feet of water when flooded, which Cleveland said occurs every winter. [Watch a video](#) of Senator Cantwell and Cleveland at the April 14, 2011 hearing. Cleveland also showed a ten-minute [video](#) that details the tribe’s precarious location as well as touches on the tribe’s recent notoriety gained through its depiction in the movie series *Twilight*. Senator Cantwell’s remarks as delivered from the Senate floor today follow. *Thank you Mr. President. For decades the Quileute tribe in the Pacific Northwest has waited for a chance to move out of the tsunami zone that they are in and into safety. And every day 80 students go to a school and a school-house that is just one foot above sea level. And every day they look directly out the window at the roaring waves of the powerful ocean. And wonder when they can move to safer, higher ground. When the tragic tsunami hit Japan last March, and when a recent earthquake in just the last few weeks hit off Vancouver Island it sent another urgent message and a wake-up call to hurry to get this legislation passed through Congress. The Department of the Interior which endorsed the legislation said the tsunami QUOTE clearly demonstrates the risks to the tribe’s citizens and the need to move its housing and infrastructure inland ENDQUOTE. Now with the one year anniversary of the tragedy less than one month away we have finally done our job. With the passage of the bill tonight the Quileute can finally begin to move out of the flood zone. I’d like to thank Congressman Norm Dicks for his help in making this a reality. The Quileute tribe has been struggling with the natural perils of this land since its reservation was created in 1889. And the river that runs through the reservation has been moving constantly over the last century, causing more erosion and flooding problems. The one road that connects the lower village to higher ground is often flooded making it even more challenging to deal with this particular area in the case of a tsunami. So the Quileute struggle to move out of the flood zone has gone on for many years. But tonight with the passage of this legislation, the Quileute tribe can now move to higher grounds and safer means to provide for their members. So this is an important victory to give the Quileute tribe and those on the reservation peace of mind. So I want to thank Senator Barrasso and Senator Akaka for helping this move out of the Indian Affairs Committee and Senators Bingaman and Murkowski for moving it out of the ENR Committee. To the tribal chairs, Bonita Cleveland and now Tony Foster, thank you for coming to Washington D.C and explaining how important this legislation is and to the National Park Service and the National Park Director thank you for your help in getting this legislation passed. And to Senator Murray for her co-sponsorship of this important legislation. It is important in times like this that Congress does act. That we break gridlock and move forward. And for the Quileute tribe, a tribe that gained much national notoriety in a recent movie series, what’s really important is not that notoriety but the fact today that people have come together to help them move to safer grounds. I thank the Chair and yield the floor.*