

**Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children**

**August 20, 2021**

**Alaska Regional Hearing**

**Introductory Session: Julie Kitka, Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN)**

**Recording:**

<https://commissiononnativechildren.org/media/video/introductory-session-by-julie-kitka-recording-august-20-2021/>

**Commissioners Present In-person:**

Gloria O’Neill (Chair); Dr. Tami DeCoteau (Vice-Chair); Melody Staebner; Carlyle Begay; and Donald Gray.

**Commissioners Present Virtually:**

Dr. Dolores (Dee) Subia BigFoot, Anita Fineday, and Dr. Leander R. McDonald.

**Commissioners Absent:**

Elizabeth Morris, Jesse Delmar, and Stephanie Bryan.

**Detailees, Staff, and Contractors:**

Ronald Lessard, Department of Education  
Eileen Garry, Department of Justice  
Regina Gilbert, Department of the Interior  
Tiffany Taylor, Department of the Interior  
Lisa Rieger, Cook Inlet Tribal Council  
Joshua Franks, Cook Inlet Tribal Council  
Miriam Jorgensen, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona  
Kyra James, Native Nations Institute, University of Arizona  
Stacy Leeds, Leeds Consulting  
Briana Moseley, Kearns & West  
Chelsea Cullen, Kearns & West  
Caisey Hoffman, Kearns & West

**Agenda: 9:30 AM – 10:15 AM - Introductory Session by Julie Kitka**

**[Transcript]**

**I. Panelist: Julie Kitka**

Chair O’Neill  
00:01 Thank you. So now I'd like to introduce Ms. Julie Kitka. For the past 30 years, Ms. Kitka has served as AFN president representing Alaska Native people drawing attention to longstanding social and economic problems facing Alaska and creating new opportunities. Ms. Kitka works at the direction of a 35-member board of directors and resolutions crafted by the delegates to the annual Alaska Federation of Natives Convention. Her job is to unify and inspire action on that

direction. Over the years, Ms. Kitka has worked closely with Alaska Congressional Delegation and other members of Congress to advance Alaska's interests in health care, education, key sectors of Alaska's economy, and for rights for Alaska Natives. Ms. Kitka holds a Bachelor's in Business from Alaska Pacific University, an honorary law degree, two honorary doctoral degrees, two Meritorious Service Awards, and many other awards and honors from various levels of the federal government, private sector, and other tribal organizations. Good morning, Julie, and thank you for joining us.

Julie Kitka  
01:15

Good morning. First of all, I want to welcome members of the Commission, the staff support, and experts that you have brought in both in-person and virtually. I sure wish this pandemic wasn't going on and that you could do all the things that we would want to welcome you here and see everybody as much as possible. Thank you for making this a priority to spend your time and energy on this Commission. We think it's a vitally important Commission, and we think that you can make a huge difference.

I'm going to break my presentation into several components on that. But first, I want to start with a little bit of history pertaining to Commissions and recommendations, and from our experience, how they can make a difference. This points to me how vitally important what you are doing is and how we see that. In our recent history, if you talk about recent history, the last 50 years, there's been numerous Commissions and studies done about our people, and much of it without the participation of Alaska Natives. As it gets closer to current times, much with our participation. We think of our land claims, which occurred and was signed in 1971, that was preceded by a landmark study called *Alaska Natives in the Land*. Which was a pivotal report that came out that shapes our history from here on out. The primary result of that report, and the work on that, was to expand the acreage that the government and the Congress was willing to convey to us as Native people to allow us to retain. So that is one, in our history, a pivotal report and effort. That happened by individuals as dedicated as yourselves, as visionary as you are, and people that just weren't going to take "no" for an answer.

Following our land claims in 1971, there was another federal report that came out in 1973, called the *Two Cs Study*. The Two C's report was a three-volume report that came out and talked about all the programs that Alaska Natives were eligible from the federal government that did not disappear or were not removed our eligibility because of our land claims in the unique model that they did in our state. I take the *Two C's Study* is also a pivotal study on anchoring the special trust responsibility with Alaska Natives and the federal government, because it was so comprehensive of everything that was available. It also gave a snapshot on how the government viewed our people, including our children and our families, and seeing the diversity in our cultures and communities.

Then quite a number of years went by, as we were all busy implementing our land claims, and issues of children and families were ongoing but not center stage. That's why the significance of your Commission, is you're pushing those issues center

stage. In 1989, the organization that I had issued a report called “An AFM Call to Action,” which basically was a synthesis of all the leading reports that were out there on Native People and our issues and a snapshot on what we were doing. At that time, we didn't have a lot of money. The report only costs us \$30,000. But that was like “beg, borrowing, and stealing” to get the \$30,000 to do it. But I want to use this as an example for you to think about in your Commission of a path that we tried, that was very successful. We took that 1989 report, which was about 65 pages, which was a synthesis of existing reports, and it wasn't new research, didn't take us forever to do it. But it was a synthesis. We immediately went to the Congress and asked the three committees that had jurisdiction over Alaska Natives, two on the Senate side and one on the House Resources Committee, which was called the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee at the time, the Senate Indian Affairs Committee, and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. We asked them to hold a hearing on it. But what was different about that was we asked them to hold a joint hearing of all three committees, including House and Senate, but all of them at the same time. We wanted to raise the visibility and the importance of the report. And so, we insisted that it be all those committees holding that and paying attention to that. As a result of that, we did get Congressional action on that report, which would not have occurred if we hadn't insisted that all three, both House and Senate, focused on it at the same time. One of the outcomes of that, besides actual programs, for example, the Job Corps Center in Palmer was a recommendation of ours. And that got funded immediately after those hearings on that. We also had Alaska Native education and equity program that got funded directly on that and other ones. But one of the recommendations, what we knew, that Congress takes more details, that they need specifics, you need to tell them what they need to do. And so, one provision that we had in there was calling for an Alaska Natives Commission to be established, to take a look in-depth, since our land claims, of a snapshot of what was going on. And that occurred in 1992. Over 200 hearings were held in our communities, from the furthest north to the furthest south to the furthest west and east. That Alaska Native Commission did its work. Those recommendations, as the three-volume report that came out of it, are just as relevant today as they were then. And the process of the hearings, and the voice of the Native people coming in and rising, and doing it was one of the most significant reports that came out in which Native people were listened to. So, I urge as you take a look, as your experts take a look, at some of the recommendations, for them to scan the recommendations section on that.

Following that, we were not happy with the speed and the progress of the implementation of the recommendations. And so, the Congress authorized the study of those recommendations of what could be done immediately and what would take longer time on that. What we took those that ended the study to - and this is another one I urge you to consider doing it - we took it to the Senate Appropriations Committee. And we said we have these recommendations, and we need your time. And so, they set up a one-day time, and set up meetings with the staff directors of every subcommittee in the Senate Appropriations Committee, to go one hour with each subcommittee staff director to go through these

recommendations and pick up areas that were in their jurisdiction that they could implement right then and there. That was a significant difference that had never been done before. But it was a very effective way to get them to focus on that, and use their expertise and understanding the Senate budgets and what they're appropriating and their budgets to implement your recommendations. And I urge that you consider doing something similar with your Commission. Senator Patrick Leahy is the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee now, and he is such a friend of the Native community that I think that he would be willing to direct his staff directors on that, to spend the time on that. And then also when you drill down into the Senate Appropriations Committee, you have the Interior Subcommittee in which our senior Senator Lisa Murkowski is the Ranking Member on that. The same thing with her committee and the chairman of that. Those are the direct ways in engaging once you get your report and your recommendations.

I also want to, before I get into talking about who we are and what we are proposing on that, also urge you to think about the timing of what you're doing. We are in a period of time of unprecedented change and action by the federal government, starting with the CARES Act, and then with the American Rescue Act, and this infrastructure bill, and the upcoming reconciliation bill. We have never seen this massive outpouring of federal resources that have come and being dispersed in a very, very short time. Be very careful that you do not delay your recommendations and reports 'till after this period of time is over. Because our view is once this period of time is over, you're going to be seeing a period of gridlock in our political process, which will stall and all these massive resources will stop. And the needs of our children across the country are so important that you must not let that opportunity go by. I know that your work will continue. You want to do a lot of hearings and everything. But kick out those recommendations that you know are good now. Get them into the process, do interim reports, do Initial reports, do monthly recommendations. But don't let this period of time of the political action of the movement of these massive resources, and the ability for you to shape that with your recommendations go by. And further on your recommendations, I recommend that if you see something that's working, tell people to do more of it. If you see value-based programs that are based on our traditional values, do more of them. Remove layers of bureaucracy, that is the thing that stifles us and stops our people from doing things. So remove those layers of bureaucracy. And one of the biggest and most successful ways to remove bureaucracy that we have found is "compacting" of programs and resources to our Tribes and tribal organizations. That started out as a demonstration project. Tlingit and Haida Central Council was the first one doing that demonstration project and the 10 Tribes across our country, Koyukuk in the Nome area was the second one the second year. They were able to prove by understanding the budgets and what could be done, that you could remove layers of bureaucracy and give greater control to Native people on these programs and services, so that our true values surface, and that our people are able to prioritize the use of those resources. As opposed to follow the mandates of the government and just be like robots doing what they're saying. We needed to wrestle control and remove those layers of bureaucracy. So anything that you can do to support expansion of compacting, and

streamlining resources coming into people, you will do a great service and empower our leaders to do a better job in families and children's issues. I also urge you don't delay, do not wait to the end of your authorization period or an extension on that to do a final report that's all polished up and really nice. Do not wait. Be activist, kick out on a regular basis your top recommendations and don't let this period of time slip by. It is some period of time that I've never seen in my lifetime available. All these major bills will have technical amendment processes that go by, that fine tune this and stuff. These are opportunities when we can major shape how these resources from the federal government are going to support our Tribes and organizations. And I, just from my experience and my value system, I want our people to be in charge of these programs. I want our people's values to be listened to. I want our communities to be resilient. I want to be forward looking. I want us to be self-determined people making a difference in our lives and for the next generation. And the tools are right in front of us on the table in this political process right now. And we need to pick up those tools and make that happen.

So that's my overview I wanted to do. Now I wanted to go into a description of who we are as Native peoples, especially for our brothers and sisters that are from outside of the state and who may have had limited experience with our people or maybe you have met leaders from different areas and you have developed friendships and working relationships for a long time on that. I want to give you a little snapshot of who we are so that you could hopefully have a big picture and then we'll go back down into specific other recommendations. Alaska Native: - in this I want to cover who we are as people, our cultures, our language, our values, our subsistence hunting and fishing ways of life, our organization, our political organization, and just general information. Again, it allows you to get a snapshot into our world, and what we're dealing with, and how we organize and how we try to make things happen. And I hope that at the end of the presentation you will see that we are no different than you. That we want to live our lives, we want the best opportunities for our children and grandchildren. But we want to be self-determined people. We want to determine our own future. We don't want to just be at the direction of other people telling us what to do. And we certainly don't want assimilation. We want our cultures and our language and our traditions to continue. But we also want a foot in the other society to build more economic opportunities and more decision-making into that. But basically, our people have lived a traditional subsistence lifestyle for more than 10,000 years. And that is pushing back even in times longer than 10,000 years. Our people were not conquered in any wars with the United States Government. Our people were not relocated from our traditional lands, and our people hunted and fished, and gathered and lived our lives across the whole breadth of Alaska from one corner to the other. If you look at a modern map today, and you see the dots on the map of our villages or regional hubs, think about a map that's got dots all over the whole landmass and that is where people will live. They didn't just live in the dots of the villages or the communities. They were all over the state. And that was the basis for our land claims, is our use of occupancy of the entire state. Like I said, they lived a traditional hunting and fishing way of life, which was very harsh and brutal, and was very, very much continues today. But it was a harsh life. We had periods of

starvation, we had periods of time and we had to move from areas to areas just to get the resources to feed our families. We had times of abundance, we had times of scarcity. And a lot of it depended on the fish, a lot of it depended on the marine mammals, depended on the land mammals and the health of those ones. So, for example, if you had a crash in a caribou herd, you could have communities and peoples that would be on the brink of starvation because of the crash in the natural ecosystem of these animals on that. So, our hunting and fishing way of life was very hard for our people. But what we have proved over the years, as you take a look at that, and you look at what how our people adapted to the changes in our way of life, so much innovation, so many things that our people adapted, and resilience and innovation to survive in harsh climates, in times of scarcity, the migration of people. We have relatives all across the north, in Canada, Greenland, Russia, I mean, the migration of people, we have people that migrated all the way down to Arizona, and ties with some of our people into the Navajos on that, so our people very much live their lives and culture and tradition and worked to survive.

Prior to World War II, we were the majority population in the State of Alaska. We were not a minority, we were the majority population. After World War II, you saw a concerted effort to move non-Native populations into our state and for the first time ever we became a minority population in our own homeland. That is significant and that has shaped things here on out, once you lose the majority population density. We still remain one of the largest Native populations in the states in the United States. We are very nearly 20% of the population now. We're very active in every sector of state and local government and decision-making on everything from health care, to education, to land and natural resources, to business opportunities, you name it. We're a very, I like to describe it, very self-determined people. That we don't want to be told we can't do something. We want to see what we can do, capture those opportunities for our people and do the best we can with the responsibilities that we have. Culturally and linguistically our communities are very diverse and continue in the traditional ways across our vast homeland on that. There are 11 distinct cultures in our state, which can be described geographically as Eyak Indians, Tlingit Indians, Haida Indians, Tsimshian Indians, who live in the southeast. The Inupiat and St. Lawrence Yup'ik live in the north and northwest parts of Alaska. Yup'ik and Cupik Alaska Natives live in southwestern Alaska. Athabaskan Indians live in the interior in South Central Alaska. And the Aleuts are in the Aleutian chain and all over. We've had a tremendous migration and mixing of our populations. A great in migration in from the smallest villages into regional hubs and from the regional hubs into the urban areas, as people have moved for both economic opportunities for their families, education opportunities, job opportunities, and also the lack of sustainable services and programs and opportunities in some of our smallest communities. So the migration, the intermarriage, the movement on that has affected our community a lot. But you've also seen reverse migration where people have moved back to our communities, assumed leadership roles, and revitalized small areas. And so you're seeing it back and forth both in migration and out migration. As I said, Alaska Natives make up a large community in our state. Nearly half of all our federally recognized Tribes in the country are Alaska Natives living in the smallest rural

villages and towns spanning the state, as well as the larger cities. Many of our Tribes and communities are very small. They face rapid change which has upended life as it was lived. Adaptation to change has been a reoccurring reality, as is the theme of living in two worlds. This has been a theme of adaptation to rapid change for at least 30 years, if not more. It has been a theme of surviving in both worlds. For a long time, it was just survival. And now the mindset of a lot of people is thriving in both worlds, thriving in the adaptation and change, not mere survival. We don't accept survival as the baseline of where we want to do. We want to thrive and grow and continue our cultures and our way of life. There's a wide array of economic, environmental, and land management challenges in our state, when you're such a large state as ours, which is two and a half times the size of Texas. Subsistence and traditional gathering of salmon, caribou, moose, berries, marine mammals, nutritional medicinal plants, and other natural resources are central to our cultures.

Alaska Natives languages were home to 20 Alaska Native languages, along with a multitude of regional dialects. While most Alaska Natives speak English, many are bilingual and return to their traditional languages. As in all cultures, language serves as a vessel for entire ways of life and thinking and relating to the world, a storehouse of accumulated knowledge, wisdom, informational, philosophical views, a sense of place, history, or relationships, social and political organization, identity, learning styles, beliefs, attitudes about everything, from food to land, to marriage to spirituality. Language expresses the unique cumulative shared experience of a group of people over generations and offers the rest of the human race another view of how to live in the world. Retention of traditional knowledge and ways of living off the land in a harsh environment is a key to our survival.

When you talk about our ways of life and values, our people are strong, resilient, and dedicated to the preserving and revitalization of our language and culture. As we move past the damage done to our people during the colonization phase of history, Alaska Native cultures are showing amazing resilience, being distinct with complex kinship structures, highly developed subsistence hunting and gathering practices and technologies, and unique in varied languages, belief systems, art, music, storytelling, spirituality, dance traditions, among many other attributes. Our premier component of our way of life, the subsistence, is really a term that describes our way of life. It is something that our people have followed for thousands of years. It's the way all cultures lived prior to the development of agriculture. It's a way of life in which everything, the economy, people's relationship to one another, the philosophy, the spirituality, even jokes, ideas about gender, the responsibilities and roles of men and women, responsibilities of children, all those things are encompassed in our subsistence way of life. All of those are things that are of value to us. And we want to continue. And so, as you're taking a look at ways to improve opportunities for children, do not write off areas such as improved opportunities for subsistence ways of life, as something that won't benefit the children because it does. Because it gives them a sense of identity, and a strength and belief in who they are, that will be immeasurably helpful to them as they are challenged by the larger Western society on their

identity, and whether or not they have any value in the world, which leads them to think about whether or not suicide and other ways of harming themselves or abusing drugs or other things on that look more attractive. So, don't ignore our subsistence way of life and ways to strengthen that when you're taking a look at ways to improve things for our children. Again, our subsistence activities are both on the land and the sea. Fishing, berry picking, harvesting, allows our families to feed their families. They also provide a center for our way of life and our communities. And we provided ourselves, it strengthens our sense of independence, and resilience and it is something that we desire to have continue. As I said, Alaska is one of the largest land masses in our country and we have occupied most of the usable lands and waters, lakes, rivers, coastal areas, in Alaska. Given that these lands and waters were and are the sources of our communities, families, and individual subsistence, the source of the materials, the use of land, the ownership of land, the federal regulations, and policy affect lands directly affects our way of life. And so, we have had to focus on both protecting our subsistence hunting and fishing rights, as well as work towards restoring our Aboriginal hunting and fishing rights, again, to protect our core identity, our core aspects of our culture and the core well-being and survival of our people for the future.

When we talk about Alaska's land, think of this, we're two and a half times the size of Texas, or 571 square miles. Our coastline is 6,640 miles. If you looked at a map of the United States, we would be at the fourth coastline of the entire United States. We're one of the largest coastlines of any state in the United States. We have 15 national parks and monuments, 13 national wild rivers, over 365,000 miles of rivers, 15,000 miles of roads. In land ownership, we're a very different land ownership style than most states in the United States. Fifty-eight percent of the land is owned by the federal government. Twenty-eight percent of the land is owned by the state of Alaska. Twelve percent is owned by Alaska Native peoples through our land claims, the retention of that through our Native corporations. So that makes us the largest private landowners in the whole state, the largest collective landowners of the state. And when you look at land use decisions and policies, hunting and fishing and other things on that, we are on an equal par with the federal and state government because we have such a massive amount of land ownership and in our control and use, and the federal government, the state government cannot do many things that they wish to do without engaging with the Native community on land ownership and jurisdiction, and government- to-government relations. As I said, we have a unique structure in Alaska because of our land claims in 1971. It was a new approach by Congress to the federal Indian policy. It related directly to the end of the termination policy and the opening of the self-determination policy. If you look at our land claims that happened at the time that President Nixon was in office, you had the American Indian Movement holding demonstrations, you had the Black Panthers doing demonstrations, a lot of unrest in the urban areas. And you also looked at the federal government looking at failures of the termination policy and how to do different things. If you look at the history of what President Nixon did on his self-determination policies on that, he basically looked around the country and saw the turmoil that was going on. And then when he looked at Native Americans on the reservations, he saw oasis of stability, he saw calm, he saw



people going about their lives, trying to make a difference for their people. And so, his self-determination policy is directly related to his views and his team of the stability that the Tribes projected and were doing going about their daily lives. He took a look at that and one of his first actions in his self-determination, was dealing with the Pueblos in Blue Lake and took a look at what the federal government had done to those people and taking away a very important lake and acreage on that, and he immediately restored it. And that was a huge breakthrough in federal policy in which the federal government really implemented in a way that wasn't federal programs or money. It was dealing with land and culture and survival.

The next big issue that they dealt with, which was on the table at the same time, was our land claims. Our land claims were rising to the top in national politics because of the discovery of the largest oil find in the whole all of North America, which was in Prudhoe Bay. And the oil companies and the federal government could not get that oil to market or build a pipeline until they had clear land claims, clear title to the land in order to do it. So that pushed the whole issue of the largest discovery of oil in North America, the unclear title in the land, the need for clear title in our land claims up to the top. Had it not gone to the top at the same time, we would have been stuck in courts and land claims courts for decades on our land claims. But the fact that it came about at the time of the beginning budding of self-determination as a national policy on that profoundly shaped our land claim settlement things moving forward. At the time, the government was looking at new models of dealing with Native Americans. They were also looking at how to move the claims of the settlement to resolution and allow for the retention of these massive lands into Native ownerships. At that time, they did what was called an experiment of having Alaska Native people form for-profit corporations to hold the title and resources of our land. It had never been done in the history of the United States, had never been done anywhere in the world. And that was what was in our land claims. Our leaders at that time were focused on the acreage in the land and the continuation of our way of life. So, they were pushing more for the acreage of the lands. The whole issue of the model that you would use for holding the lands was not the top issue that was not what people were fighting for at that time. It was all about land, the whole motto was "take our land, take our life." But that began a new era for us in Alaska, of having to deal with the implementation of our land claims. And if you ever look at a hard copy of our land claims, it was one of the most complex Land Claims Settlements in the entire United States. It was one of the most generous in terms of land resources. It also included subsurface, where some areas especially in Canada, you look at their subsurface, the subsurface of oil, gas, and minerals were retained by the Canadian government, not put into ownership of Native people. In our settlement, the subsurface, as well as the surface, was conveyed to our people on that. Again, it was a unique model, but it also has helped shape us. You can have debates of pros and cons and whether or not you like it, or you don't like it or how it is, but one thing that is indisputable from that settlement and the for profit model in doing it was another tool given to the Native people to use in the economic system and to be able to compete in the in the global economy and the national economy in ways that we never had the opportunity or foothold in. So, again, this is not the point of this discussion to talk about that, but I

just wanted to raise it with you because it does shape subsequent things of our development as Native people.

We also at that time formed other organizations to help on different aspects on that. Again, our land claims was based around a regional model, loosely around our culture and language within our state, that had a regional component, had a village component, but what that also did was mirror in other organizations of our Native community. For example, in the Bethel area, the Association of Village Council Presidents was and is a nonprofit tribal consortium. That model that membership of the tribes and villages on that is mirrored in the for-profit corporation of Calista. So you have right now and they actually formed Calista. The AVCP formed it. Same thing with the other organizations. The non-profit tribal consortiums are the mothers of these for-profit corporations, because they formed these tools to use. So what you have in modern Alaska in Native organizations, is you have regional organizations which are mirrors of other organizations. So for example, in the Kotzebue region, you have Manillaq, which is the tribal regional consortium, you have federally recognized Tribes in every village, you have a for profit, NANA Regional Corporation, which is a mirror of Manillaq, as well as adding other people, as shareholders on that. So you have that all over the state, multiple organizations. You also have in when you look at our villages, you have villages that are totally traditional councils, you have villages that are IRA councils, you have villages that have municipal governments that have formed it to access different state resources, you have communities that are part of boroughs, you have communities that are part of unorganized boroughs. So when you look at that, the Native community, you see layers upon layers of organization. And sometimes it's really hard to figure out how this all works. But it is really important to kind of understand how that is because Native people are trying to make it work. They're trying to use these as tools to improve things for our people. Our non-profit tribal organizations are experts in this compacting, they are just amazing what they're doing and how they're pushing it out. And our Tribes are really pushing out compacting as well, this ability to run programs to accomplish their goals. One shining example, which I understand you had a chance to see a little bit yesterday is the development of our health system. Again, that is an example of an all-Alaska compact, which was negotiated over two years, final decisions ratified in the Congress on that, but moved our health system from over the Indian Health Service into Native operation and control, again, the largest tribal compact in the history of our country, largest current health compact in the United States. And you can see for yourself, what that has done for our people. And that may not be needed all over the country. But it is that type of process needed for an area the size of our state in which you could not have doctors, or radiologists, or nurses all in every single community. And you could not build up hospitals in every community, you needed to be able to consolidate and pool those resources together to develop efficiencies of scale and model and best practices and continue to develop, but we're very proud of our tribal health system. We feel that during this pandemic, it has really showcased the strength and resilience of our healthcare system. And I'm convinced it saved hundreds and hundreds of lives by being there for our people during this pandemic. Again, on the state and federal side -- we have local government, state

governments, we have village corporations, we have these consortiums. We also have school districts and Borough School Districts and single village city site school districts. So, these multiple layers are really important when you take a look at that. Other just little facts for you to think about. We are the biggest state in the United States in landmass. Juneau is our state capitol. Denali, our mountain in the center of the state is 20,320 feet above sea level, the highest point in the United States. Alaska has 39 mountain ranges, and 17 of the 20 highest peaks in North America. And the reason I tell you this geography is our communities are spread in and among these mountain ranges, in and among the geography of that, and that has also shaped our cultures, and our way of lives. So, you could look at a geography of the state of Alaska and put our communities among that geography and you'll see why things are important to our people. If our people are living in an interior, things, different things are important to them, versus if they're living on the coastline, which they had whales, or they hunt walruses, or they hunt seals. Or if you're living in the interior, and you're looking at the migration of the caribou, you're looking at, but don't forget the geography and the diversity of our cultures, based on the geography and where people live. It is not an insignificant thing, that when you're trying to understand our people.

I guess that that's it on kind of the overview. Now I wanted to focus, if we have time. And I don't know Gloria, how are how are we doing on time? Do we have time for a few recommendations?

Chair O'Neill  
41:47

We have about five minutes left? We'd love to hear your recommendations. Julie, if you also have them in writing? If you could send me those recommendations, we'll make sure that they get into the record as well.

Julie Kitka  
42:01

Yes, and I also want to make available time to answer any questions if people have questions, too. We're glad to provide supplemental information. We're glad to set up other hearings around our upcoming convention that we have planned in October, to help facilitate more dialogue and information into your deliberations. Again, I can't thank you enough for your dedication for doing this on behalf of our children. I want to assure you that what you're doing is worthwhile and it really will make a difference. Individuals and collective groups, like this, do push and shove the systems that affect our people. They can have breakthroughs and make huge differences from the life of one child to a whole community to our whole populations.

I want to basically tell you about two things on recommendations. 1) We have started engaging in first ever state-tribal compact of social services with our children with our state of Alaska. It's in a fledgling thing for last couple years, making tremendous inroads on that. Again, anything you can do to facilitate states to compact with their tribes on things affecting children such as child welfare, that is a way to bring in the policymakers at the state level and empower the Tribes. So that is something really, really important to us. We've made breakthroughs on that, and our people are very excited about that. It also shows the change in our state government and system to be willing to trust the Native people to have more say so

over the well-being of their children, the removal of their children, the placement of their children, in the foster care of their children. Supporting these efforts and urging the federal government to support these in really concrete ways will make a huge difference.

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Another thing that we are in the process of doing with the state of Alaska, is scoping process on tribal control of our schools. Right now we have a state constitution that requires providing education for all Alaskans, including Alaska Natives. So we have a school system that is primarily run by state structures on that, and we're embarking on compacting of our schools. Anything that you can recommend to support compacting of schools and support those Native people that are negotiating with their states to try to wrestle greater decision-making and control over schools will have a really positive impact on our children.

And then lastly, as I mentioned before, please consider picking out your recommendations as they develop sooner than later. Engage with the process that's going on right now, and don't let that opportunity go by. So with that, Gloria, I will wrap it up and any other recommendations we'll just put in writing to you. I'm open to any questions that people might have.

Chair O'Neill  
45:29

Yes, thank you. I would also like to acknowledge a few more Commissioners that joined us online. Commissioners, please introduce yourself briefly. Commissioner Dee BigFoot.

Commissioner  
BigFoot  
45:51

Hello. This is Dee BigFoot. I'm at the University of Oklahoma Health Services Center, and I run the Indian Country Child Trauma Center, and the Suicide Prevention Resource Center. So thank you, Julie. Your information was wonderful, and I appreciate hearing from you. Thank you.

Chair O'Neill  
46:18

Thank you, Commissioner Anita Fineday.

Commissioner  
Fineday  
46:27

Thank you. My name is Anita Fineday. I'm in Minnesota right now. I'm a member of the White Earth Tribal Nation in Northwest Minnesota. Thank you so much for your comments. I work with Casey Family Programs, and I'm in charge of the Indian Child Welfare team at Casey. Thank you.

## II. Questions and Discussion

Chair O'Neill  
46:45

Thank you, and we'll take about five minutes and open up for questions. Commissioners, do you have questions? Yes, Commissioner Begay.

Commissioner  
Begay  
46:59

Thank you, Madam Chair, and Julie thank you very much for a very detailed analysis of recommendations. There's definitely a lot of information there that you've given us to unpack, and very much appreciate your experience and your federal

advocacy, your experience, and working through the maze of our federal decision makers, that I think really resulted in a lot of the leading edge areas of reform that many of the Alaska Native communities and organizations here in the State of Alaska have been leading. I've commended many of the leaders and organizations that we've met with over the last couple of days of really taking the lead in the concept of sovereignty and self-determination and taking those opportunities to the fullest. And it was great to see firsthand a lot of the great programs and services that are being provided to your people here in Alaska. And with that, I think, just have a couple of different requests. And maybe one question.

The first is it would be great to get a copy of those reports that you've mentioned. I think there's a lot information perhaps in those reports that we can build upon. As you stated a lot of good information that is still relevant to today, and perhaps information that we can take to build into our report, and perhaps as you stated, to take advantage of the timing of initiatives in DC and focus in an effort to perhaps highlight some of the areas of need today versus perhaps waiting for the full report to come out.

One question I have for you is, I think that challenge that we have, perhaps as a Commission, and I'm sure you've heard this, Julie, in your experience, is that there's really not a one size fits all approach when we talk about Tribes collectively in this country. And in my experience and working with Tribes across the country, there's definitely a different perspective as it relates to the government-to-government relationship between, not only the federal government, but state government and local government as well. And I maybe get a sense that, for example, in the Midwest, there are a lot of leaders who really lean on the perspective of federal trust responsibility, and that federal programs have the direct responsibility of providing services and programs and leading that effort on behalf of their Tribes, versus there are some Tribes like in Alaska where there's definitely a sense of the need to compact and contract as many programs as possible as you stated. In your experience, my question is, how do you feel the Commission should address those differences in perspective and history in relationship that Tribes collectively around the country have with the federal government? And perhaps capture the recommendations that you had stated in your report?

Julie Kitka  
50:25

Well first of all, as I started with saying, my first recommendation, if you come across something you think is working, encourage people to do more of it, right? So, the diversity means that everybody organizes and develops different ways on different timelines and leaderships that are there. So if you see something that's working, encouraging them to do more of it. The second thing is, really want to urge people to think in terms of new technologies that are out there. There is a tremendous amount of collaboration that can occur for people that are located in one area, that want to stay in their area, but they want to expand opportunities for their children. It's unlimited, what opportunities that we can create for our children with the use of technology. And doing collaborations with people that have the same values that we do provides a lot of encouragement and strength to our people as they go about dealing with some of these challenges on that. Again, not

one size fits all. You're right, some people want to do direct services on that, and that is great. Others just have different perspectives and different needs, or maybe where they're living and the challenges that they're facing, they feel that the compacting model works better for them. So I would support them both. I would make sure that you really are, if you see something that's working, support it. That is the name of the game. We don't need to reinvent things. We need to lift up our leadership and say, when you're doing these awesome things, keep going, do more, let's get you some more resources, let you expand it to greater numbers of children and people that it can affect on that. We just want people to live up to their full potential. We're not trying to assimilate people into a larger society. We want them to have maximum options and be able to live their lives. We want our children to live free of abuse or neglect or scarcity, or abuse on that. So sometimes necessitates having interventions in there such as, you know, your Indian Child Welfare and other things on that because of the problems on that. So don't leave everybody just on their own on that, but give people those tools for them to grow as a people and within their culture and within their language and their values. And like I said, the moon's the limit on that is my view.

### III. Wrap Up

- Chair O'Neill 53:10 Thank you. Thank you so much, Julie, for visiting us today. I wish we had more time because I think we could probably take another hour with you. But we are past time and we have another panel starting in about five minutes. And I know folks may want to have a quick restroom break as we set up the room. So, I really appreciate your leadership, Julie, and thank you for the time today.
- Julie Kitka 53:39 Thank you and good luck in your deliberations and safe travels.
- Chair O'Neill 53:44 Thank you.

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**

[Transcript completed by Kearns & West]