

**Testimony for 111th U. S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, D. C. 20501**

October 7, 2009

Good Morning. My name is Brenda Shemayne Edwards. I am the Chairwoman for the Caddo Nation of Oklahoma. I am here today to talk about funding issues we have with the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

The United States of America has a legal responsibility to its citizens and its dependent Indian nations to assure that its federal laws are carried out. NAGPRA developed a systematic process in determining the rights of culturally affiliated descendants to certain Native American human remains, associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (as defined by NAGPRA). However, little funding has been made available to tribal governments to fulfill basic consultations and repatriations with repositories which house these collections. The funding made available has been highly competitive through the NAGPRA grants program with the National Park Service.

NAGPRA funding levels have remained basically the same since its inception. For the past 15 years, around 2 million dollars per year has been available. The funding is highly competitive with *no basis in actual need*. As such, a tribe with millions of dollars from casino revenue monies has the same chance of getting a grant as a tribe like us, with no casino revenue and limited financial resources. In 1994, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Review Committee recommended that Congress set-aside 10 million dollars for the first year of funding. However, only 2.3 million was set-aside. In 2008 funding levels were at their lowest at under \$1.58 million.

The Caddo Nation of Oklahoma was one of the first tribes to submit and receive NAGPRA funding from the National Park Service in 1994. Southwest Arkansas, northwest Louisiana, eastern Oklahoma, and northeast Texas have long been considered the Caddo homeland. Throughout every one of these states and spread from the east coast to the west coast, Caddo human remains and funerary items continue to be housed and stored on shelves.

Our NAGPRA office has worked tirelessly over the past 14 years to identify and repatriate human remains and funerary objects from across the United States. Just recently we submitted a proposal to the Department of the Interior explaining some of the issues we have faced.

Currently, we know of over 130 different museums, universities, and repositories that hold collections of either human remains or funerary objects, along with unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony. The reality is if we were to receive a NAGPRA grant each and every year, it would be at least 130 years

before all of our human remains, associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony could be repatriated.

For well over a century, burials and cemeteries containing the human remains, associated funerary objects, unassociated funerary objects, sacred objects and objects of cultural patrimony have been subjected to looting and collecting. Even today, there are numerous websites found on the Internet that buy, sell, and trade Caddo funerary objects. There are also private museums that house (and oftentimes, buy, sell, and trade) Caddo funerary objects.

In 2001, 21 Caddo funerary vessels were stolen from the Texas Archeological Research Laboratory at the University of Texas in Austin. A \$10,000 dollar reward went out and the objects were eventually recovered. Five years later, the University of Arkansas at Magnolia reported the theft of 26 Caddo funerary objects. These objects were being held at the university on behalf of the Vicksburg District Corps of Engineers and were to be repatriated to the Caddo Nation. Federal investigations are ongoing but these funerary objects have not been recovered.

We are in a conundrum. There are a number of new “Caddo” museums being proposed across the homelands of the Caddo. They receive their funding through a variety of means; investors, universities, loans with local banks, donations and grants using the Caddo collections they have as leverage. Many of the repositories where Caddo human remains and funerary objects are housed also continue to receive funding for research projects related to these collections to create educational tools for the general public, yet our own museum has only one small exhibit space, one full-time employee, and no support staff.

Lastly, it is sad to note that our ancestors continue to be regarded as merely “natural resources” instead of human beings. I am not aware of any other ethnic group who is subjected to this stereotype. I sincerely request that these important funding issues be addressed and corrected in such a way that the work we have done in the past can continue on in to the future. Repatriation is important for our people. The act itself is a show of love and respect for our ancestors. Repatriation is also a way for our children to learn about where we came from and who we are as a unique culture. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Brenda Shemayme Edwards
Chairwoman
Caddo Nation of Oklahoma