

Statement of Dr. Thomas Karier

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Hearing on the Columbia River Treaty, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

United State Senate

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Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Tom Karier and I am one of the two Washington state Council members who serve on the Northwest Power and Conservation Council. I also represent the State of Washington on the Sovereign Review Team, which was created to assist the U. S. Entity in reviewing and developing options for an informed recommendation to the State Department on whether it is in the best interest of the U.S. to continue, terminate, or seek to amend the Columbia River Treaty.

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council is an interstate compact comprising the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington. The Council was authorized by Congress in the Northwest Power Act of 1980, P.L. 96-501. The Council's mission is to ensure the Pacific Northwest an adequate, efficient, economical, and reliable power supply while also protecting, mitigating, and enhancing fish and wildlife populations that are affected by the Columbia River Basin's hydroelectric system.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, in 1964, the Beatles made their first trip to America, gasoline cost 30 cents a gallon, and the United States and Canada inaugurated a treaty to share the benefits from the Columbia River. Fifty years later, the first two are a distant memory, but the same Columbia River Treaty continues to govern the operations of several dams in Canada.

The Columbia River Treaty was a monumental achievement. Two countries cooperated to build and operate three major hydropower dams on one of the world's greatest river systems. Increased hydropower generation attributable to the Canadian dams paid for the construction of the projects and stimulated economic growth throughout the region valued in the billions of dollars. While flood risk in the lower river was not eliminated, it was greatly reduced.

But the original Treaty recognized that an agreement to build and operate dams could not last forever and allowed for changes after 60 years. The world has changed since 1964 and so must the Treaty. We no longer need an agreement to build dams, as we did in the 1960s; we need an agreement to operate dams that responds to today's needs.

Discussion in the Northwest has identified what a modernized treaty can provide for the region. We need relief from costly entitlement payments to Canada valued at \$250 million to \$350 million per year. We need an agreement to protect citizens above and below the border from flood risk. We need to factor in fish survival, the ecosystem, cultural resources, and water supply when we modify the timing of flows across the border. All of these areas can and must be addressed, and we are working on a fair and balanced regional recommendation to the State Department that fully reflects these opportunities.

Washington state has a major stake in the success of this effort. The actual power benefits to the United States are estimated to be only about one-tenth of the current entitlement payment to Canada. We are concerned because our ratepayers pay approximately 70 percent of the entitlement, including the 27.5 percent paid by public utility districts in three counties and our state's share of Bonneville Power Administration costs. We have an immense financial and social investment in recovering fragile populations of salmon and steelhead, and we would like to see treaty operations support and reinforce those investments. Our cities and counties are at risk of flooding, and we need to know that the United States and Canada are cooperating to ensure their safety. We also rely on the river for irrigated agriculture that produces food for the world and for navigation to move our production to markets. Every year, millions of tourists visit the Columbia River and Lake Roosevelt for recreation, bringing economic benefits to local communities.

As we work to finalize our recommendations to the State Department, we need to ensure that the interests of all sovereigns and stakeholders are fairly represented. Once we find that balance, we expect the State Department to help the Northwest secure these benefits in the national interest, even if this means deferring to U.S. entities accountable to Northwest sovereigns and stakeholders in the actual negotiations. Our state and Governor stand ready to help in that process.

Finally, in order to preserve and expand the benefits of the treaty, we should do our best to maintain the collaborative spirit with our Canadian partners that has served both countries so well for so many years. We envision a future in which the citizens of both countries will look back at 2024 as the dawn of a modernized treaty, one that secured economic and environmental benefits for both countries for many decades.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify on this important Pacific Northwest issue.

The views expressed in this statement are those of the Council members from the State of Washington and do not represent the Council as a whole.