

Elwha River Celebration Speech

Keynote Address
Sen. Bill Bradley

September 16, 2011 – Dinner hosted by the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe
on the occasion of the removal of the two dams on the Elwha River
Vern Burton Center
308 East 4th Street
Port Angeles, WA 98362

PART I

We are here to celebrate the future of the Elwha River and to give thanks to all those members of the community, and all those across the country who worked so hard for so long to set in motion the restoration of the Elwha.

I hope our hosts will allow me to put the spotlight on a few of the people who did not grow up on the river, but who listened to the River. Who listened to the tribe's leaders and elders. People who can rightly take satisfaction in the work they did for the Elwha.

I am, to be sure, one of those who draws great satisfaction from this moment. As Chair of the Senate Water and Power Subcommittee, I saw my position as an opportunity to use the resources of the Senate to begin undoing some of the unnecessary damage inflicted on communities and the environment in the early years of water and power development. I had a particular drive also to bend the arc of history to bring justice to Indian people whose lives were so frequently and unhappily interwoven with the rivers that the United States chose to develop for water supply and power.

One person stands out of all those who drove this effort. The person is, of course, Congressman Norm Dicks. Norm fought for the Elwha settlement legislation on the first day and every day since. He was an original co-sponsor of the legislation. He was fighting for the Elwha before it was in his district. He fought for the Elwha settlement when members of the delegation from the other party who had supported the legislation reversed themselves and opposed it. Norm fought for the Elwha settlement under President Bush, President Clinton, the second President Bush and now under President Obama. Norm outmaneuvered every obstacle thrown at him by budget cutters, dam huggers, friend and foe.

He guided the settlement through years of post-enactment negotiations. He brought substance and energy when others paid lip service. He found solutions to every problem. He worked with every party and devoted himself to preserving the broad consensus that made the settlement possible.

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Congressman Dicks' commitment is an extraordinary case study in the power of a single, unalterable, determined legislator to do the public's business and serve his constituents well. Norm Dicks is the Elwha settlement's hero. He made the law work.

I know it is a small thing, and it is far less than he deserves, but please, God, please grant Norm Dicks the first 100 pound salmon caught on the Elwha. On second thought, God, make it Senator Patty Murray who will catch the first 100 pound salmon. She deserves it for all her work over all these years of getting the appropriations in the Senate to bring us to this day.

Former Senator Brock Adams should be remembered in the fight for the River's future. He led the effort for the delegation in the Senate. He and his staff, particularly Mike Weland and Jim Gunsolus, helped frame the settlement, fought for its passage, and made the critical difference for success in the Senate. For months in the late 1980s and early 1990s, every time I saw Brock on the floor, in a hallway, or at a hearing, he bent my ear about the Elwha. His spirit is here; he is a major reason this day has come. He deserves to be remembered for what he did for the Elwha.

Al Swift represented this district when the settlement was framed. He helped negotiate the agreement and was an original sponsor. And he had the worst job of all of us. Not because of his district, but because he had to win the support of the Committee's Chairman, John Dingell. He also had to move the bill through the two other House committees with jurisdiction over the bill. Al was tenacious. Apparently he was also fearless. He did what he had to do, and those of us who were there will never forget what it took to bring Chairman Dingell on board. I can't remember exactly what the Chairman wanted, and it doesn't matter. Words were used. Things were said. Nothing I can share with such polite company... But Al made it happen. He won that must-win fight. We are grateful to him.

All of us in Congress were fortunate that, even during the Bush Administration, there were voices from the Executive Branch that spoke for rivers, Indian tribes, and a positive future for the relationship between people and the environment. Not all of them were authorized to speak to us about these things, but one of them was absolutely unfailing in speaking her mind and helping us decide what to do for the River. Maureen Finnerty was Olympic National Park's superintendent at the time we put the settlement together. She, along with her colleagues, Kat Hoffman and Brian Winter, met with us here and on Capitol Hill literally dozens of times. Her principal concern was, of course, the park, but she was also an astute judge of the community's needs and priorities and helped guide us toward a solution that we see today. She served the National Park Service and this park and its river in the finest tradition of the Park Service. She deserves to be recognized for her essential role; she has earned our deepest admiration and gratitude.

I also want to say a nice thing about one of the best lobbyists that Washington has ever known. I actually refer to him as an advocate, not a lobbyist. The Elwha settlement was

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extremely fortunate that one of the major players in the negotiations, Daishowa America, chose to be represented in Washington by Terry Bracy. Terry had been Mo Udall's chief of staff. Terry knows exactly how Capitol Hill works. Terry was a creature of the House, but he knew the Senate equally well and was a true master of the legislative process. He was smart, intuitive, trustworthy, and knew his business. He had the unenviable job of explaining Congress to a foreign-owned paper company, and convincing very skeptical business people that their interest lay in a deal that would separate their mill from the generators that fed it power. For most of the last 20 years since the settlement, Terry has chaired the Udall Foundation, the premier grantor of college scholarships for Native Americans, and as Chair led the establishment of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution. I've heard him say that the Elwha settlement was a major inspiration for the creation of what is now the nation's most prestigious and successful environmental dispute resolution center. We owe Terry our deepest thanks.

I also want to say something nice about lawyers. A number of the nation's best environmental, natural resource and energy lawyers were part of the Elwha settlement and have helped with implementation.

When I was chairman of the Water and Power subcommittee, I had my own lawyer — my general counsel, Tom Jensen. Put simply, this legislation would not have happened without Tom. But what many of you may not know is that Tom came to the Senate Committee staff with the Elwha already as his client. Tom had worked here in the Northwest on salmon issues for the Columbia River tribes and Pacific Salmon commission. When he came to Washington, D.C., he brought a copy of Bruce Brown's book on the Elwha with him, Mountain in the Clouds. He kept it in his office. He'd been on the river. Seen the dams. Spoken with the Indians and non-Indian fisherman. Knew the history. And he knew the law. One of the first and best pieces of advice I got from Tom was that there was a way to bring the dams out of the Elwha, restore the salmon, and take care of the human needs tied to the river. He came to work for the Senate determined and ready to restore the Elwha and to restore the Nation's word to the Lower Elwha Klallam people. I turned him loose. And here we are.

I came to appreciate Tom as the most creative, energetic and knowledgeable natural resource and energy lawyer I had ever met. He usually knew the answer before others knew there was a problem (which could be a little irritating at times, I have to admit).

Our work with the Elwha was guided by the combined actions and determination of hundreds of people. Ours is a collective achievement and our celebration is communal. I have named only a few of the people who served in public office who helped get us here. Let me name also my friend and House counterpart, Congressman George Miller, his former staff Dan Beard and John Lawrence. Our committee economist, Karl Hausker, who crunched all the numbers and saw that they added up. Former Governor Booth Gardner. Don Baur and Guy Martin, who represented James River. Lyndee Wells and Russ Bush, who represented the Tribe. Shawn Cantrell from Friends of the Earth and Polly Dyer from Olympic Park Associates. Orville

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Campbell and Dick Goin from here in the community. And throughout, Joel Connolly at the Seattle P-I and Eric Pyrne at the Times told the story of what was happening. Joel and Eric were among the first to understand what we were doing, and I think they shared our passion. There are too many others from government, the private sector, environmental and fishing communities to be named, but all of them deserve our thanks. This community alone has hundreds of its citizens who worked in some way on the Elwha, who will be a part of its future, and to whom we owe our thanks.

PART II

Now I want to tell you what I'm feeling about the Elwha. The evening may be ours, but the moment in time is the River's.

We have been brought together by the power of a River.

We are collected here tonight, in one place for a few hours, like the way the River collects pebbles in a bar on a bend in the river. Different colors, different sizes, shapes. Some hard, some soft. Some rounder than when we started.

We have been brought here, in this grouping, at this time, by the power of the River.

The honor we share tonight is profound.

Enormous things are about to happen.

We have waited a very long time to be here. It is a grand, magical moment.

Salmon and stone and water — together again. This time let it be for all time.

It is time for beautiful fish to restore the circulation of energy and nutrients into the earth. Time for the rich life of the sea to flow up into the mountains, and the mountains themselves, enriched again, to move stone-by-stone, grain-by-grain, down to the sea.

It is time to allow the River to return to life.

In less than the lifetime of a Chinook, the Elwha is going to be a free river again. In less than the lifetime of an alder or willow, the Elwha is going to renew itself to be not only free again, but truly wild, truly natural, truly, finally, again, as it was at creation when its fresh cold water first met the sea.

The renewal has already begun. The River is healing itself as we stand here tonight.

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We know what the River wanted because it always had a voice. Our hosts tonight have listened to the Elwha and listened to the life in the Elwha for more generations than can be counted. They spoke for the Elwha with a voice that never wavered, never left any doubt about what the river was calling for. The Lower Elwha Klallam tribe, its leaders and members, cared for the River, lived from the river, and brought the River's voice to every audience that could be found. They even found me.

I heard what had happened to the River, and because of that, what had happened to the Tribe. It is one of the stories that stays with you. So many stories about how the United States dealt with the first Americans are stories that stay with you, no matter how many years pass. The stories have power. And so many of the most powerful stories have rivers in them. Pick-Sloan. Pyramid Lake. Celilo. Klamath. Kinzua. The power in the stories rises from our own well of moral judgment when we see lawlessness and injustice in the acts of the United States.

But the stories also have power because we see the potential for redemption. For restoring honor. For keeping promises. For repairing damage. For doing the right thing.

Each of us owes the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe the greatest possible gratitude for their unceasing efforts over decades to bring back the River's life. To tell us all what the River needed. And we owe the Tribe the greatest deference and respect for the burdens its people and society have borne because of what was done to the River 100 years ago — stopping life, stopping the rocks from the mountains on their journey to the sea, stopping the life of the sea from going up and into the mountains. Stopping the Elwha salmon with whom the Elwha people shared the Elwha River.

It was early June, 19 years ago, when the Tribe sent its Chairperson, Carla Elofson, with elder Beatrice "Bea" Charles, vice-chair Beverly Bennett, and Rachel Kowalski, the secretary-treasurer and fisheries manager, back to Washington to tell the Congress what the River needed. I am sure Robert Elofson was also with them, as he was so often in Washington pressing us to act. I was chairing the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing on the Elwha settlement legislation. I remember the four women well. We had heard that day from a parade of white men. They're a little harder to remember. But the four women from the Elwha, I remember them.

Mrs. Elofson made sure we understood the context and the historical moment. She said, *"It has been many years since the tribe and the Senate discussed the issues before us. The last time was in 1855 when our ancestors signed the treaty of Point No Point, and the U.S. Senate ratified it. When the treaty was signed, we were promised that in exchange for giving up our land, the United States would be sure we had a safe place to live and that our fish would be protected. For at least the past 80 years since the first dam was built on the Elwha River, it has been impossible for the United States to keep its promises. I came here today to ask the United*

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States to keep its word and stop the harm suffered by three generations of Klallam people and the wild salmon on the Elwha River.”

Bea Charles told us how her father had led his family to high ground when the dam broke in 1912. He had been washing at the river and heard the flood coming. Apparently nobody had thought to warn the Native Americans.

She spoke of the salmon and the devastation of the Tribe’s economy when the salmon runs collapsed. And she made a plea, based on hope. She said, *“I feel again I would like to see the dams removed while I’m still alive. I may not see the abundance of fish come back in my lifetime, but I would like to see it come back for my grandchildren, my great grandchildren and for the rest of my people, the following generations to come. It was a gift from our Creator.”*

In less than a generation, if Mrs. Charles’ grandchildren look back at this moment, I hope that they will see that this was the moment when it became clear that her hope for them would be rewarded. That this was the moment when we all really knew and could let ourselves believe that the Creator’s gift would be returned.

The River is healing itself now as we share this evening together. It’s happening.

I am compelled by the times we live in to point out that the Elwha legislation had bipartisan support. It was sponsored on a bipartisan basis. Supported by a Republican governor. Passed Congress on a bipartisan basis. Signed into law by a Republican President. Implemented under Republican and Democratic Administrations.

The reflection you see in Elwha is an image of what our country is capable of. Not only in the past. But tomorrow. And years from now. For our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. When they are calling the shots, deciding whether and how to work with each other, and defining the public interest. Here, in the success of our collective action for the Elwha, is a template for success on climate change, energy policy, oceans conservation, species protection, and the hundreds of other issues.

Right now, when it’s just us and a river waiting for the dams to come down, it may be difficult to conceive of the inspirational power of what you have done. But when the salmon return, when the dippers and the herons and beavers and the bears crowd the banks, when the life of the ocean and the mountains are joined again, when justice is done for native people, you will have here something that moves lives and inspires people thousands of miles and continents away from here. It will be compelling, empirical proof of the health and practical genius of our own democracy.

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This will be the place where our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren can see the life of the planet restored. They will see the tangible power and great beauty of what you have achieved.

We are restoring honor. We are keeping promises. We are doing the right thing.

Your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren — they will be proud of you.

It will be the great gift of the Elwha — Hope.