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Chinook Nation asks President Obama for federal recognition

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The Chinook Nation traveled to Washington, D.C., in January 2001 to meet with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Then-Assistant Secretary Kevin Gover signed the decision to recognize the tribe but it was later revoked by the Bush administration. Photo from BIA

For more than three months, the [Chinook Nation](#) of Washington has been writing [President Barack Obama](#) almost every day, seeking federal recognition.

Chairman Tony Johnson started the [Executive Recognition Project](#) on June 8. Each day, a [letter](#) and information is sent to the [White House](#) in hopes of restoring a status the tribe once had in its reach.

"We all went back to Washington, D.C. on Jan. 3, 2001, for a recognition ceremony," former chairman Gary Johnson, who now sits on the tribal council, told Courthouse News Service. "It was a huge day after 23 years fighting that battle. We finally got our status clarified."

The celebration, which came during the [final days of the Clinton administration](#), was short-lived. The Bush administration issued a [new finding in July 2002](#) that said the tribe did not qualify for recognition despite documentation of their links to the [Lewis and Clark Expedition](#).

"How in the world does somebody in Washington, D.C. even get to make this decision?" Chairman Johnson told Courthouse News Service. "How in the world could you say that you have the knowledge or expertise to decide whether a people are a people? Whether we are Chinook without being here, without living here amongst us? Just in its premise it's asinine."

The tribe has been asking Congress for recognition but that hasn't succeeded. The tragic death of U.S. ambassador [Chris Stevens](#), who was a tribal member and a descendant of [Chief Comcomly](#), failed to sway anyone in D.C. even as controversy over the September 11, 2012, terrorist attack in [Benghazi, Libya](#), lingers over the presidential aspirations of Democratic candidate [Hillary Clinton](#), who was Secretary of State at the time.

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