

HONORABLE RONALD B. LEIGHTON

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON  
AT TACOMA

CHINOOK INDIAN NATION, et al.,

Plaintiffs,

v.

RYAN K. ZINKE, in his capacity as  
Secretary of the U.S. Department of  
Interior, et al.,

Defendant.

CASE NO. C17-5668-RBL

ORDER ON STIPULATION  
REGARDING SUPPLEMENTING  
THE ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD

On May 21, 2019, the parties in this case entered into a stipulation that the Court would review three documents *in camera* to determine whether they should be added to the administrative record or withheld due to privilege. *See* Stipulation, Dkt. # 89. As a refresher, this case concerns the Plaintiffs’ challenge to a Final Rule by the Office of Federal Acknowledgement (OFA) that bars unsuccessful petitioners for federal acknowledgement of tribal status from re-petitioning.

Plaintiffs seek to supplement the administrative record with the following documents. The first document (attachment to AR0007983) contains edits by the Department of the Interior Office of the Solicitor to draft OFA talking points regarding how a tribe petitioning for acknowledgement can get additional time to respond to OFA’s technical assistance review of

1 their petition. The second document (attachment to AR0007948) is a memorandum prepared by  
2 an OFA staff anthropologist containing her comments and edits to the OFA’s Final Rule. The  
3 third document (attachment to AR0009030) is a memorandum between OFA officers regarding  
4 the preliminary discussion draft of the Final Rule. Yup!

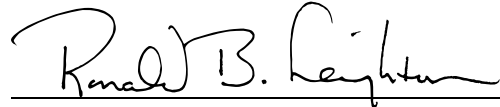
5         The “deliberative process privilege” protects “documents reflecting advisory opinions,  
6 recommendations and deliberations comprising part of a process by which governmental  
7 decisions and policies are formulated.” *Dep’t of Interior v. Klamath Water Users Protective*  
8 *Ass’n*, 532 U.S. 1, 8 (2001). It “rests on the obvious realization that officials will not  
9 communicate candidly among themselves if each remark is a potential item of discovery and  
10 front page news, and its object is to enhance ‘the quality of agency decisions’ . . . by protecting  
11 open and frank discussion among those who make them within the Government.” *Id.* at 8-9  
12 (quoting *N. L. R. B. v. Sears, Roebuck & Co.*, 421 U.S. 132, 151 (1975)). “Information is  
13 protected by the deliberative process privilege if it predates the governmental decision and is  
14 ‘deliberative’ in nature,” with the key inquiry being “whether disclosure of the information  
15 would expose the decision-making process in such a way as to discourage candid discussion  
16 within the agency.” *Thomas v. Cate*, 715 F. Supp. 2d 1012, 1019 (E.D. Cal. 2010) (citing *F.T.C.*  
17 *v. Warner Commc’ns Inc.*, 742 F.2d 1156, 1161 (9th Cir. 1984) and *Carter v. U.S. Dep’t of*  
18 *Commerce*, 307 F.3d 1084, 1090 (9th Cir. 2002)).

19         These documents meet the requirements for the deliberative process privilege. The first  
20 document includes crossed-out sections of text and line-edits that clearly reflect the OFA’s  
21 deliberative process. The second document expresses the candid and often critical comments of  
22 an OFA staff expert. If such information were included in the administrative record it would  
23 discourage lively debate within the agency during the rulemaking process. The third document  
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1 again contains hand-written notes critiquing the draft rule and suggesting changes. These internal  
2 discussions should not be added to the record.

3 IT IS SO ORDERED.

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5 Dated this 11<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2019.

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8 Ronald B. Leighton  
9 United States District Judge  
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