

# Washington Newsletter

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# Helping Our Neighbors Tackle Climate Change

By Daren Caughron  
and Carla Montilla



The last house on Holland Island in the Chesapeake Bay as it stood in October 2009.  
This house fell into the bay in October 2010. (CC License from baldeaglebluff/Flickr)

**W**e are halfway through 2024, and global warming is continuing to break records, with scientists increasingly predicting that this year could surpass 2023 as the hottest year. One thing is abundantly clear: climate change is more than a potential threat—it is here.

Communities around the world are seeing sea levels rise, flooding worsen, drought conditions intensify, biodiversity lost, and much more. The climate impacts are crashing directly into countless other pre-existing challenges, creating the truly global crisis that we now understand climate change to be.

Extreme weather, for example, forces people to migrate and drives conflicts over increasingly scarce resources. One prime example is South Sudan, where changing climate patterns have increased tensions between smallholder farmers relying on rain-fed agriculture and nomadic pastoralists. As available fertile land decreases, more communities are forced to compete for existing resources.

These openings for conflicts are not limited to just South Sudan. The 2023 State of the Global Climate Report by the World Meteorological Organization found that the climate crisis has impacted tens of millions of people worldwide. It has led to billions of dollars in losses and damages, devastated food systems, and increased communal tensions.

The cruel irony of the climate crisis is that its effects are most immediately felt by communities in the Global South—by those who contributed least to the emergency. Many developing countries cannot afford the transition to cleaner energy sources needed to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. They also do not have the resources to build the infrastructure to protect their communities from such effects as wildfires, floods, droughts, and sea level rise.

Without these measures, communities in the Global South will be left without the capacity to withstand the growing impacts of climate change.

These communities need support from wealthier nations. And wealthier nations, like the United States, have the moral obligation to supply this help.

Today, the impacts of the climate crisis are borderless. In 2022, we saw devastating floods in Pakistan. At its worst, more than one-third of the country, an area the size of Wyoming, was flooded and at least 8 million people were displaced.

Droughts in the Horn of Africa left more than 20 million people hungry in 2023, spelling disaster for communities in Somalia, Sudan, and elsewhere already wracked by civil and political unrest.

This year threatens even more chaos in the Caribbean, as an intense hurricane season ramps up around Haiti. It threatens to increase poverty and forced

migration in the event of a catastrophic impact on the island-nation. All the while, Haiti continues to wade through unprecedented levels of gang violence and desperation.

To put it simply, climate change is making the world poorer, less peaceful, and hungrier. Whatever pre-existing challenges a country faces will only be made worse by climate change. We must act to break these cycles of suffering.

This year is shaping up to be an important one for global climate action. Delegates to the United Nations climate summit in Azerbaijan in November will have critical negotiations to increase the global goal for international climate assistance. This is the funding that developed countries will provide to support developing countries' transition to clean economies and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

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Student Tom Torlino (Navajo), upon his arrival in 1882 and in 1885 at the Carlisle School in Carlisle, PA. Photo: Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center.

# "Most Just Don't Know the History of Boarding Schools"

By Tim McHugh

**T**he United States has never acknowledged the historic trauma and pain of the Indian boarding school era—a dark chapter in our history full of terror and cultural genocide against Native children, families, and their communities.

To address this, more than 300 young adults from all over the country gathered in Washington, D.C., for the annual Spring Lobby Weekend, March 16-19. With the leadership of The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, they lobbied for the passage of The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (H.R. 7227/S. 1723).

Their lobbying resulted in immediate co-sponsorships for the bill. By early June, it was passed out of committee, setting the stage for a floor vote in the House. The Senate companion bill was heard a year ago, and now heads to the full Senate for a vote in the coming weeks.

"Our network played a critical role in this positive outcome," said Rachel Overstreet (Choctaw Nation), FCNL's legislative representative for Native American advocacy. "Together with our partners, we continue to work with legislators to ensure

the passage of this important measure for healing and truth for Native communities."

From the early 1800s through the 1960s, Christian churches collaborated with the federal government to create some 408 boarding schools in 37 states or territories. Each school was intent on stripping Native children of their Indigenous identities, beliefs, and languages.

Quakers ran 30 of these boarding schools, and they have only recently begun to come to terms with their role in running them.

**"Most just don't know the history of boarding schools. They don't realize that even though boarding schools closed, the stealing of native children continued."**

"When we say, 'boarding schools,' most people think privilege, polo shirts, horses. Boarding schools are elite. Boarding schools are the top," said Theresa Sheldon (Tulalip Nations), director of policy and advocacy for The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, in addressing the Spring

Lobby Weekend participants. "Most just don't know the history of boarding schools. They don't realize that even though boarding schools closed, the stealing of native children continued. All of this was legal. This was all legal by federal law."

She said that the federal government is primarily responsible because it ran, funded, and orchestrated these schools.

By the early 1990s, due in part to the 1978 passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act, many of the largest schools had closed. Those that remain are overseen by tribal nations. Enrollment, believed to be as high as 60,000 students in the 1970s, was as low as 9,500 by 2007.

But closing the schools was only the first step. The truth of what happened at these boarding schools needs to be known, preserved, and shared. The Department of the Interior is currently leading an investigation into boarding schools. But its authority is limited.

The National Congress of American Indians, The Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, and other tribal nations began working to establish a federal commission to formally investigate Indian boarding school policies. The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act is the main legislative vehicle for this.

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Special guests during Spring Lobby Weekend were Deborah Parker (Tulalip/Yaqui/Apache), Theresa Sheldon (Tulalip Nations), and Larry Wright, Jr. (Ponca Tribe of Nebraska). They told stories on why a truth and healing commission is important for Native communities. Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL.




*Climate Change from page 3.*

As one of the biggest contributors to the greenhouse gas emissions driving climate change, the United States should lead the world in solving this crisis.

FCNL recognizes that the long, rich history of moral teachings from the Religious Society of Friends calls us to not only care about the environment but to actively advocate for those who may not have the power or privilege to do so themselves.

In times like these, we are reminded of Psalm 24:1: "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein." It is a moral imperative to protect and restore the earth and the people in it.

Funding for international climate assistance for our global neighbors is one of the most effective ways the United States can fulfill this calling of caring for our planet. By doing so, the United States will ensure that we bring ourselves closer to the world we seek, and an Earth restored.

*Daren Caughron is FCNL's legislative manager for sustainable energy and environment. Carla Montilla is the program assistant. Tell your member of Congress to support global climate assistance at [fcnl.org/assistance](https://fcnl.org/assistance).* 



Spring Lobby Weekend was attended by 333 participants, of whom 70% were first-timers. They made 100 lobby visits, 41 of which were to Republican offices. Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL.



*Boarding Schools from page 5.*

Once passed by Congress, the commission will also examine the assimilation practices, and human rights violations against Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians.

Its final report to Congress will contain recommendations on how to work towards healing for survivors, families, and Indigenous populations.

Advocates for the bill stress that the commission must have the authority—such as subpoena power—to access records organizations have not voluntarily disclosed to facilitate the atonement and healing process central to this legislation.

Faith communities, including Quakers, are filling in the gap and beginning to acknowledge their complicity in the pain and

harms of the shameful Indian boarding school era.

The Friends Committee on National Legislation would like to especially thank the following guests for addressing Spring Lobby Weekend: Deborah Parker (Tulalip/Yaqui/Apache), CEO of The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition; Larry Wright Jr. (Ponca Tribe of Nebraska), executive director of the National Congress of American Indians; and Theresa Sheldon.

*Tim McHugh is FCNL's director of media relations. Tell your member of Congress to support the creation of a truth and healing commission on the Indian Boarding School Era at [fcnl.org/truth](https://fcnl.org/truth).* 

# Voices of Young Adults Lobbying for Truth and Healing

*During Spring Lobby Weekend, March 16-19, 2024, we asked several participants why they lobby for The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (H.R. 7227/S. 1723).*

## Carson O'Rourke

(Oglala Lakota)  
Kile (Pine Ridge), SD



"The Indian boarding schools were terrible and tragic. Perhaps they believed they were doing the right thing. But the truth must be told. This problem cannot be solved—will never be solved—without knowing the truth. Many powerful institutions do not want to see this bill signed into law. We will not be silent forever."

## Qunmiġu Kacey Hopson

(Native Village of Barrow)  
Anchorage, AK



"Just about every Native I know has been shaped somehow by the Indian Boarding School Era. This bill can make a huge positive difference in their lives. America has a moral imperative to make this right. If nothing else, to own it. I hope more groups of faith follow the Quaker leadership that I have witnessed here on this issue."

## Calvin Miller

(Native Village of Barrow)  
Utqiagvik, AK



"I traveled here from a very small town North of the Arctic Circle. It is inspiring to see civic engagement in action. Really learn first-hand about democracy and lobbying on an issue of such importance to my area and I. Boarding schools were one large part of an overall campaign of violence. That can't be ignored."

## Rogelio Meixueiro

(Xidza)  
Dallas, TX



"There are tribes from all over here. There are even international tribes. To be in the same place as so many other Native people like me is awe inspiring. Our biggest obstacle right now is education—or the lack thereof. A lot of people are scared of the truth."

## Kristen Velasquez-Howe

(Southern Ute)  
Reservation, CO



"I am here to put a face to this issue and this bill. I have close family members that are Indian Boarding Schools survivors. I know the impact they have had on so many people just like me. I carry it with me every day. I won't let it remain hidden."

## Avery Hunter

Flint, MI



"If we don't get the facts, if we don't get the truth out, this pain and trauma will never be resolved. You can't cover up facts forever. Wrongs need to be accounted for and atoned for. Kids were murdered. Families were torn apart. How would you feel if it happened to you and yours?"



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Clerk: Michael Fuson  
Assistant Clerk: Mary Lou Hatcher  
General Secretary: Bridget Moix

Editor: Adlai Amor  
Writers: FCNL Staff  
Design/Layout:  
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245 2nd Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002  
202-547-6000 » [fcnlinfo@fcnl.org](mailto:fcnlinfo@fcnl.org)  
[fcnl.org](http://fcnl.org)  
Facebook: @quakerlobby » X: @fcnl



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Cover Photo: Participants of the 2024 Spring Lobby Weekend lobbied members of Congress and their staff in support of The Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act (H.R. 7227/S. 1723).  
Photo by DAGFoto/FCNL.



Photos by DAGFoto/FCNL

As the war in Gaza continues to escalate and reverberate throughout the Middle East, increasingly more Quaker churches and meetings have issued minutes to express their concern for the conflict. There are more than 70 Quaker minutes at [fcnl.org/gazaminutes](https://fcnl.org/gazaminutes).

Each minute is a distillation of Friends' grief, fear, confusion, and concern into a collective and corporate statement of belief and action.


"In alignment with the individual and collective message of the Divine Spirit and guided by love and the Inner Light, we call for the work of waging a just and permanent peace. Through peace, we open the bridge to reconciliation," writes Whitewater Monthly Meeting (IN).

These minutes are also powerful tools for advocacy. Meetings and churches often share them with their members of Congress, include them in articles to their local newspapers, and share them publicly in their meeting spaces.

These collective statements, along with the more than 680,000 letters to Congress, facilitated by the Friends Committee on National Legislation, have made inroads in Congress.

As of June 30, more than 90 members of Congress are calling for an end to the Israel-Palestine war.

"Peace-making is the work of a lifetime," wrote the Brooklyn (NY) Monthly Meeting. "Quakers have been at it for more than 350 years. This is no time to be discouraged by this and other worldly conflicts. Rather, we must continue to speak truth to power on behalf of all earth's people and living creatures."

*Alicia McBride is FCNL's senior director for Quaker leadership. If your Quaker community approved a minute on the war in Gaza, please email it to [quakers@fcnl.org](mailto:quakers@fcnl.org). *

# More Quakers Express Concern for Gaza War

By Alicia McBride

