

Yakima Herald - Jun 7, 4:06 AM EDT: Colvilles argue about \$193 million settlement

By SHANNON DININNY, Associated Press

TOPPENISH, Wash. (AP) -- The money hasn't arrived yet, but some members of a Native American tribe in Eastern Washington disagree about how best to disburse a \$193 million settlement from the federal government over mismanaged land royalties and accounts.

Hundreds of members of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation have signed a petition pushing for tribal members to receive 50 percent of the money, but the tribe's business council has proposed giving 20 percent to tribal members. The rest would go toward rehabilitation of timber and other lands, which supporters say would put many tribal members back to work following an economic downturn that forced the closure of its timber mills.

The spat is likely to play a role in the June 16 election for seven open seats on the 14-member council - a point made clear at an open session for tribal members living off the reservation to hear from the candidates.

"We're tired of not being heard and the council doing what they want with it. It's not about the money. It's about being heard," said Joanne Sanchez of Moxee, who organized the petition drive.

More than 1,200 people have signed the petition so far, including 370 collected by one supporter who went door-to-door on the reservation, Sanchez said.

The Colvilles were among 114 tribes that filed suit against the federal government to reclaim money lost in mismanaged accounts and from royalties for oil, gas, grazing and timber rights on tribal lands. The government announced in April that it had agreed to pay more than \$1 billion to settle some of those cases, but negotiations continue on dozens of other cases.

Among the largest recipients so far: the Osage Nation in Oklahoma at \$380 million, Montana's Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes at \$150 million, and the Colville tribe at \$193 million.

Twelve Indian bands comprise the Colville tribe, whose reservation covers 1.4 million acres of north-central Washington's Okanogan Highlands. The Colvilles have about 9,700 members, though as many as half have moved away from the reservation to find work or seek opportunities elsewhere.

About 100 people turned out at the session Wednesday evening at the Yakama Nation's tribal headquarters in Toppenish, 20 miles south of Yakima and 190 miles from the Colvilles' tribal headquarters in Nespelem.

In addition to making the case for more money for individual tribal members, many argued for better educational opportunities and job training, improved services for seniors and veterans and health care coverage.

Most tribal members receive health care at Indian Health Service clinics, but those aren't as available for people who leave the reservation, said Larry White, 61, a retired veteran who lives in Yakima.

"It's kind of shameful," he said. "We move and live and travel. This health care issue needs to be addressed."

Two incumbents and two challengers for the seven seats were on hand to share their thoughts. All said they would support a 50 percent share of the settlement for tribal members.

Councilman Harvey Moses Jr. acknowledged that he had changed his position after receiving a "whole bunch of calls" from people who need the money, but said the rest of the money would have to go toward rehabilitating the isolated reservation's natural resources.

"We talk about education - we pay for that through our natural resources. Other tribes are closer to the population centers. We're not," he said. "There are ideas out there to diversify our resources. We need to look at those."

The tribes filed suit after Elouise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet Tribe from Browning, Mont., brought a similar claim on behalf of thousands of individual Indians over the government's mismanagement of their trust lands.

The government ultimately settled the Cobell case for \$3.4 billion, but it remains under appeal for various reasons by four people.

