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Wars Will Be Fought Over Water, Not Oil

Climate change in recent years has become a buzzword from both sides of the political spectrum as they debate about the existence of, and the extent of which it is affecting us as both a Nation and civilization. No one knows the effects and the immediate danger that climate change imposes more so than southwestern and northern tribal communities. States in the southwest have had declarations of drought going as recently as 2000, almost the entirety of my lifetime (A Closer Look).

The drought has only gotten worse in the recent years as Arizona which is now placing restrictions on water usages with aims to cut back their intake by a fifth of their dedicated portion of the Colorado river; this water source accounts for 36% of Arizona's water needs (James). The impact of this reduction will first be felt in commercial usage by 2022, this will affect industries such as water suppliers and agriculture. Not only is this alarming economically as agriculture is roughly 2% of Arizona's total Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but the restrictions will also eventually trickle down to the individual. If the drought continues to worsen in the next century, the water shortage is expected to increase by 25%(Ackerman).

In the north, the Yakama Nation has had to grapple with the reduction in their access to salmon in their lands due to climate change. This is concerning when considering the sacred value that salmon holds to their culture. Not only are the salmon sacred to the Yakama people, but they're a means of sustenance both physically and economically. Their local bodies of water are reporting deadly temperatures for the salmon, sometimes exceeding 71 degrees. This heat causes ailments to fish, which is linked to thermal stress, visible on the fish (Pool). This will only become more commonplace as climate change continues to worsen.

My concerns for my tribal community as well as others, lie within the U.S. government respecting the rights that are defined by treaties and nation to nation agreements that specifically allow Tribal entities to have access to natural resources like water or salmon. I am afraid that if climate change continues at this rate, Indigenous people's rights will be seen as a necessary casualty for the sake of resources. Historically this is not a new trend, as an example, the Paiute Tribe was driven from their homelands in 1863, due to discrepancies with farmers over land and water use, ensuing the Owens Valley Indian War (Forstenzer, 1992).

More recently, Navajo Tribal water rights have been reduced as the impact made by *Winters V United States* had been minimized by the Navajo Hopi Little Colorado River Settlement. This settlement reduced claims the Navajo Tribe had on the lower Colorado River, conflicting the claims of asserting sovereignty and unlimited access to water made by Assistant Attorney General for the Navajo Nation, Stanley Pollack (Yazzie, 29-30).

I plan to make a positive impact on the environment by continuing to pursue my degree in economics, and then on to get my law degree. Once I finish with my education, I will be well-equipped to assist my tribe and others in strengthening our sovereignty and enforcing it through both the law and economical means. This will allow tribal entities to create fruitful economies that do not rely upon degrading the environment.

This not only extends to Tribal nations, but also includes the United States as a whole. In the oncoming years, as climate change continues to become an increasing threat, the nation will look to economists to reconfigure the economy to be more environmentally sustainable. I hope to be one of those economists, who not only participate in change but more importantly, I will be able to navigate the process in a way that will maintain tribal rights to our resources while securing a better environment with both my leadership and experience in the field.

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