

**United States House of Representatives
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis**

**Hearing on November 18, 2021
“Tribal Voices, Tribal Wisdom: Strategies for the Climate Crisis”**

Questions for the Record

**Dr. Casey Thornbrugh
Climate Change Program Manager,
United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.; and
Tribal Climate Science Liaison,
DOI Northeast and Southeast Climate Adaptation Science Centers**

The Honorable Kathy Castor

- 1. Dr. Thornbrugh, would you agree that to fight the climate crisis and adapt to its unavoidable impacts, all nations around the world must play their part to reduce carbon pollution and invest in resilient infrastructure?**

Yes, and this includes ensuring that Tribal Nations are included in broader plans, dialogue, and legislation, as the U.S. seeks to address the climate crisis. In fulfillment of the trust obligation, the federal government has an inherent responsibility to ensure the protection of the natural and cultural resources that support the health and wellness of Tribal communities, as well as to support Tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Therefore, it is critical that Tribal Nations have access to the necessary resources to address the effects of climate change within our communities.

- 2. Dr. Thornbrugh, the Build Back Better Act contains incentives like tax credits for new and used electric vehicles and investments in electric vehicle charging as well as rebates for residential appliance and equipment electrification. Would you agree that these types of investments can help reduce U.S. demand for oil and gas? If other nations, including in Europe, made similar investments, would that help reduce global demand for oil and gas?**

Yes, though we note that electric vehicles generate their own environmental issues, particularly with battery lifecycle management; and vehicle charging stations present concerns, particularly if the energy source is from a coal-fired power plant. This issue is more complex and a suite of actions including reduction in oil and gas demand is needed to avoid unintended consequences. We urge Congress and the Administration to work nationally and internationally to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate the impacts from Climate Change.

The Honorable Garret Graves

1. **Clearly from your testimony you are concerned with global emissions. From a pure scientific standpoint and from a global emissions perspective, is there any difference between a ton of CO2 emitted from China versus a ton of CO2 from the U.S?**

It is critically important that all nations, including the United States and China, work to reduce emissions globally in order to mitigate Climate Change impacts.

2. **We know from a 2019 study by the Department of Energy's national labs that U.S. LNG exports to Europe have a 41% lower emissions profile than Russia natural gas to Europe. We know from what President Biden's own Department of Energy said last month, that there isn't a single scenario where demand for natural gas doesn't go up over the next 30 years.**

From the standpoint of global emissions, who would be best to supply that natural gas – U.S. LNG or Russian gas that comes with at least 41% higher emissions?

While the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund does not have a position on domestic energy production outside of Indian Country, such as natural gas pipelines, we—in the strongest possible terms—insist that any expansion of this infrastructure in the United States requires Tribal consultation and the avoidance of any impacts to Tribal sovereignty, sacred sites, or public health.

Further, USET/USET SPF member Tribal Nations, and those respective Tribal lands and energy resources, are located within a large region that presents diverse geographical environments and opportunities for both conventional and renewable energy development. Our member Tribal Nations could benefit from the unlocked potential of those energy resources and realize energy development goals, through appropriate Congressional action and investment in Indian Country; and further actions by the Administration, particularly to promote balanced geographical representation and inclusion of USET SPF member Tribal Nations in energy programs.

USET SPF has established its energy priorities, as follows:

- ✓ Tribal self-determination and control of natural resources and energy assets, to make conservation and development decisions to preserve Tribal sovereignty, protect Tribal assets, and to achieve economic independence, creation of jobs, and improvement of Tribal members' standard of living.
- ✓ Tribal capacity building effort involving multiple federal agencies, universities, and the private sector.
- ✓ Reform core federal programs, expertise, and funding to support Tribal energy resource development and market access.
- ✓ Remove barriers to the deployment of Tribal energy resources, such as bureaucratic processes, insufficient access to financial incentives, and interconnection and transmission on power grid.

The Honorable A. Donald McEachin

- 1. When drafting the Environmental Justice for All Act, it was critical that Chairman Grijalva and I get feedback from a variety of stakeholders on the legislation, including from Tribal and Indigenous leaders.**

As new policies are created, and grants are distributed from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act can you please clarify how you feel the federal government can best ensure meaningful stakeholder engagement, including the types of engagement that would be most helpful?

As the federal government works to implement the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), it is critical to understand that Tribal Nations are not merely stakeholders. Our relationship with the United States is political, and its accordant responsibilities are unique, separate from, and supersede any responsibilities the federal government has to other communities. As such, meaningful Tribal consultation must occur as new policies are created and funding is distributed. Meaningful Tribal consultation involves seeking guidance and input from Tribal Nations, and then implementing that guidance in the administration of IIJA. As the IIJA is implemented, federal trust and treaty obligations should be paramount. Tribal sovereignty should be honored fully, especially regarding decisions about climate-friendly and other development on our homelands. In distributing funds to Tribal Nations under IIJA, the federal government should focus on the following:

- Rapid, equitable deployment of funds using existing funding mechanisms, including Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) contracts and compacts, and avoiding competitive grants or matching requirements;
- Affording Tribal Nations maximum flexibility in the use of all funding allocated under IIJA; and
- Ensuring Tribal Nations are not subject to burdensome administrative requirements for use of these funds. This includes application, reporting, audit, or other types of compliance requirements.