



HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE
CLIMATE CRISIS

Opening Statement of Chair Kathy Castor
Hearing on “Tribal Voices, Tribal Wisdom: Strategies for the Climate Crisis”
Select Committee on the Climate Crisis
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The original stewards of the land, Indigenous people and communities, have a great deal to teach us about tackling climate change. While, over the centuries, Tribal Nations have carried the painful scars of stolen land, forced removal, and genocide, they’ve also endured, survived, and proudly held on to the sacred traditions, unique traditional ecological knowledge, and the wisdom they inherited from their ancestors. Today, during this Native American Heritage Month, we’ll have an opportunity to listen to distinguished Tribal leaders and experts from across Indian Country on how they are addressing the climate crisis. And we’ll discuss how Congress can partner with Tribal Nations to create an equitable clean energy future for all communities.

Tribal Nations are on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Extreme weather events are impacting sacred lands, burial sites, and cultural traditions. And the long-term risks of climate change – including sea-level rise, extreme heat, and decreased precipitation – are threatening the health and livelihoods of millions of Native Americans.

As we work on solving the climate crisis, Congress has a responsibility to respect Tribal sovereignty, to help Tribal Nations build resilience to climate impacts, and to support their leadership in transitioning to a clean energy economy. We must partner on innovative solutions, drawing on the extensive ancestral knowledge and capabilities across Indian Country. And we must ensure Tribal voices have a seat at the table and that the federal government ensures Free, Prior and Informed Consent as part of tribal consultation informing federal decisions. Today, we have reason for optimism. This week, during a Tribal Nations Summit at the White House, President Biden announced a historic initiative to integrate Tribal knowledge into federal decision-making.

And earlier this year, President Biden tapped our former House colleague, Deb Haaland, to lead the Interior Department, and she became the first Native American cabinet secretary in history. The President also has appointed more than 50 Native American leaders to positions throughout the Administration, and last month officially declared Indigenous Peoples Day as a federal holiday.

The Biden-Harris Administration also has taken tangible steps to protect lands sacred to Tribes. In a short year, the Administration has restored protections for Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante; protected Arctic waters and the Bering Sea; and suspended oil leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The President has also made a point of collaborating with Tribal

Nations on the America the Beautiful Initiative – a voluntary, nationwide effort to conserve 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030.

Here in Congress, we are also making important progress. On Monday, America cheered as President Biden signed the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which will invest over \$13 billion dollars in Tribal communities and indigenous people. This historic infrastructure law invests more than \$3 billion dollars for tribal transportation programs; over \$2 billion dollars for tribal broadband and digital equity investments; and nearly \$1 billion dollars for tribal drinking water and clean water investments. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law also will invest \$150 million dollars in plugging, remediating, and restoring tribal orphaned well sites; and \$130 million dollars for tribal community relocation projects.

But that's not all. This week the excitement is building as we're poised to build on those investments with the Build Back Better Act, which includes a major investment to address health disparities in tribal communities, as well as in tribal resilience and adaptation.

As you'll hear from today's witnesses, these investments are critical right now. I want to thank them all for being with us today. And I look forward to today's discussion.