

Opening Statement of Representative Greg Gianforte
Full Committee Hearing
“Addressing the Urgent Needs of our Tribal Communities”
July 8, 2020

I thank the gentleman from Oklahoma for yielding. I appreciated his leadership on the Indian Health Service Task Force last Congress.

I have long asked that we hear from Indian Country and I am glad we are having this hearing. Native Americans make up nearly 7 percent of Montana’s population and more than 2 percent of the US population.

I was proud to finally pass legislation restoring federal recognition to the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Cree in Montana last year. Federally recognized tribes enjoy a nation to nation relationship with the US government.

This recognition allows tribes to access critical resources for economic development, health care and education and regulate affairs on tribal lands. These resources often come with complicated federal procedures. We need to better understand these challenges to increase opportunity in these communities.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Americans rely on a broadband connection for their daily activities. Broadband is essential for business,

education, and telemedicine. Many tribal lands in the United States are among those areas in our country that lack adequate broadband access.

Each tribe has unique challenges for deployment, from rough terrain to complicated and expensive federal permitting regimes.

Last month, I joined with Republican members to introduce legislation that would help streamline some of those reviews, making it easier for companies to deploy broadband infrastructure and close the digital divide. Additionally, the FCC offered tribes early access to a 2.5 gigahertz band in order to ensure that tribes could obtain spectrum licenses. While these are great first steps, we must do more to close the digital divide.

Also key to Tribal nations is energy – access to it, as well as the ability to develop, produce and sell it. Many tribal nations are rich in resources that they use for energy development and production.

In my home state of Montana, the Crow Tribe produces coal and faces challenges exporting it. One of our witnesses today is Chairman Sage of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe. The Southern Ute are engaged in oil and gas production on and off the reservation. These energy

resources are economic drivers, and fund investments and other businesses for the tribes.

Not all Tribal lands have these types of resources and services developed and readily available. Many still have issues with access to electricity and safe drinking water. We need to understand how to address these challenges.

I look forward to these important discussions during our hearing today.