

Responses to the Questions for the Record
House Natural Resources Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee
Examining 50 years of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act
Quapaw Chair Wena Supernaw

1. Have there been any major issues your tribe experienced when negotiating or renegotiating any compacts that Congress should be aware of?
The primary issue we face is insufficient funding. As you heard, the Nation strongly supports self governance, and we will continue to pursue it. But we do so at great cost. Dollar for dollar, the Quapaw Nation contributes far more to our government than the United States does. IHS and BIA funds are an important revenue stream, but they fall far short of the amount needed to live up to the United States' treaty and trust obligations.
2. How has self-governance brought the idea of "local" government back to Quapaw Nation and the surrounding communities?
The Quapaw Nation's self governance program reflects the priorities of the Quapaw Nation, not the priorities of BIA staff back in Washington D.C. This means we are able to create programs that work best for us. I mentioned our drug treatment center in my testimony; that is an example of a program that IHS would never have come up with on its own. But we did because its right for us. Government needs to be flexible and self governance gives us the ability to do that.
3. When the Quapaw Nation began negotiations to take over some economic development-related services, what was that experience like?
Efficient government is economic development, and that is what we've created at the Quapaw Nation. Our government is small but nimble. When we entered negotiations with the BIA for land functions, which are really key to economic opportunity, they proceeded just as other functions did. BIA did not prioritize them, but it also did not deprioritize them. The agency respected that the tribe was making a decision that was right for us.
4. How has compacting out realty services allowed Quapaw Nation to work at the speed of business rather than the speed of the Federal Government?
Realty is an important function for us, and one that allows us to process business, agriculture and residential leases more quickly than when we relied on the BIA.
5. ISDEAA turns fifty this year. We have seen tremendous success with increased self-governance. Please share how turning to self-determination and self-governance has

changed the trajectory of your tribe?

As I said in my testimony, self-governance has empowered the tribe in a way we never thought possible. It gave our government the tools to be more active for our tribal members, but it also gave us the confidence to use that knowledge to make economic growth a priority as well. We knew that if we could run a government well, we could run a business well too. We did that, and now it is our businesses that are the keys to our future.

6. Please speak to how self-governance amplifies the government-to-government relationship the Quapaw Nation has with the U.S. Federal government?

Self Governance does not mean sole governance. It's a partnership. We work with our federal partners to make sure that our needs are met, and that their laws are followed. We find the happy middle ground.

7. How does increased tribal sovereignty positively impact surrounding communities?

The Quapaw Nation's self governance agreements have allowed us to better serve our members, but also our neighbors. We now provide all municipal services to the City of Quapaw, for instance. We provide law enforcement to other local jurisdictions, including some across state lines. It is nice that the tribe can bring these assets to the table in a government to government dialogue; it means we don't need to always show up with our hat in hand.

8. Has your tribe dealt with any roadblocks in self-governance compact negotiations?

- a. What changes need to be made to address these roadblocks?

The biggest hurdle is funding. We struggle to take on new functions and services if there's not the money for it. We already have to allocate large sums of our economic development to fulfill the obligations in our self governance compacts, but expanding further is financially risky because we bear the disproportionate burden.

9. Why did Quapaw Nation decide to compact services?

- a. What are potential factors that would discourage a tribe from pursuing a self-governance agreement?

We chose to pursue a compact because we valued the flexibility and reliability of that agreement compared to spotty service from the BIA and IHS. The challenge, as I have previously said, is that there is not always ample funding to administer the programs. We need to align self governance funding more closely with the actual costs of running programs.

10. What has been the biggest detriment to Quapaw Nation's self-governance opportunities that Congress should be aware of?

a. How best can Congress work to address these issues?

I sound like a broken record, but even in a time of austerity the answer has to be additional funding. Running programs on a shoe string budget has created too many gaps in service, and with more funding, we would be able to provide a service that the tribal government is proud of.

11. What changes should Congress make to the self-governance process to ensure continued successes for tribes?

In addition to funding, I liked what I heard from other tribal witnesses at the hearing: provide tribal nations greater authority to approve transactions, should they wish to do so. There are certain federal approvals even fully self governing tribal governments can not make, so we need your help in freeing up greater opportunities for us and our people