

HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEMBER DAY HEARING

Congressman Tracey Mann, May 14, 2025

MEMBER DAY REMARKS

- Thank you, Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Committee, for the opportunity to speak with you today.
- I represent the Big First District of Kansas, 60 primarily rural counties in central and western Kansas. The Big First's backbone is agriculture; it is home to more than 60,000 farms and is made up of farmers, ranchers, feed lot managers, nutritionists, ethanol producers, ag lenders, and agribusiness owners who feed, fuel, and clothe the world.
- Our producers are working tirelessly, every day, to keep us all fed while dealing with the burdens of inflation, drought, and market fluctuations. The last thing they need is the federal government handcuffing them with senseless red tape that threaten their livelihoods.
- The designation of the lesser prairie-chicken as "threatened" in places like Kansas is yet another of these unacceptable DC bureaucrat regulations.
- Kansas producers have voluntarily conserved more than 40,000 acres of habitat for the lesser prairie chicken through both private investments and conservation programs at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- One Kansas rancher told me that he spotted a lesser prairie chicken on one of his pastures where his cattle were grazing. He had to move all the cattle from not only that pasture, but also the other pastures adjacent to it, just because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife recorded that bird. Imagine having to upend your livelihood for something like that, in your own life.

- The population of the lesser prairie-chicken rises and falls with rainfall, not the normal activity of farmers and ranchers. Historic droughts in the Great Plains have affected the lesser prairie-chicken population and the wheat harvest, which has been devastatingly small in the past years.
- Big government doesn't need to step in and force farmers and ranchers to upend their operations for the sake of this bird whose population is predicted to bounce back on its own with rainfall, as it did by 2016 after a drought just three years before.
- I fully support any efforts of the Committee to stand up for producers' rights to private property and self-determination, and look forward to seeing this burdensome regulation overturned.
- I would also like to take some time today to discuss Haskell Indian Nation's University, located in my district in Lawrence, Kansas.
- Established in 1884 by federal legislation aimed to fulfil the United States' treaty and trust obligations to provide a high-quality education to American Indians, Haskell is the only Tribal university in the world with an entirely indigenous population. It is a one-of-a-kind, historic and invaluable institution. However, and let me be clear – when it comes to Haskell, the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Education have dropped the ball. Years of mismanagement, lack of oversight, and cycles of misconduct have all compounded, and Congress needs to conduct serious oversight.

- The students and faculty at Haskell deserve a safe learning and working environment. I was encouraged by the Committee's oversight efforts in the 118th Congress, and hope to see that continued this Congress.
- I, along with Sen. Jerry Moran, are planning on introducing the Haskell Indian Nations University Improvement Act, which would federally charter Haskell and separate them from the governance of the BIE. The Federal government has sadly done a disservice to this school, and one way to make this right is to put the education of Haskell's students back in the hands of Indian country. While the Federal government will still be obligated to provide necessary funds to the school, governance would be transferred to qualified Tribal leaders from across the country. This legislation would open the door for opportunities that Haskell is currently not eligible for, the ability to expand educational programs, and provide Native students with a safe learning environment.
- I encourage all of my colleagues to support this legislation when it is introduced.
- As the Committee continues to work on legislation and oversight surrounding the Endangered Species Act and Haskell Indian Nations University, I ask that you ensure my comments today are taken into consideration.
- Thank you for the opportunity to speak on these timely and important issues, and I yield back the remainder of my time.