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Thank you, Chairman Westerman, and members of the Committee on Natural Resources, for allowing me to share my views on this important field hearing, entitled “Federal Energy Production Supports Local Communities.”

On November 15, 2021, the Department of Interior announced a decision to consider a withdrawal of 300,000 acres surrounding the already protected Chaco Culture National Historic Park—a buffer around the park of about ten miles, thereby barring new oil and gas leases in the affected area. This has, and will continue to, result in spreading poverty among the tribe, lowering their standard of living, and depriving the tribe and the country of much needed oil and gas.

In December 2019, our office conducted a field hearing on the Navajo Nation Reservation in Nageezi, New Mexico. Over 500 people came to the hearing and gave testimony about the importance of oil and gas to their lives, their tribe, and their people. Notwithstanding the excellent environmental record the Navajo Nation has when it comes to resource development, democrats and radical environmentalists stopped additional resource development in Chaco Canyon and actively pursue means to shut down the current production.

Tribal members who own allotments containing mineral rights have been ignored and excluded from the Chaco Canyon process. The 24th Navajo Nation Council has passed legislation supportive of energy development in the region and opposes the establishment of a 10-mile buffer around Chaco Canyon.

The Navajo Nation Council was willing to allow a buffer around the park of five miles, thereby reducing the number of allotments affected from 418, made up of 16,615 allottees and 66,576 acres to 53 with 5,462 allottees and 8,479 acres—according to calculations made by officials from the Navajo Nation. This compromise would have kept seven-eighths of the land in native hands, but the Interior Department ignored this reasonable offer.

Although local residents were 100% in favor of the resource development, outside interests insisted on shutting down a significant source of inexpensive energy and stopping tribal members from gaining economic independence. A good portion of the seized land is private and belongs to individual members of the Navajo Nation. Stealing native land from this tribe again a century and a half is beyond malicious.

In fiscal year 2013, the combined revenues for the four counties that are near the proposed Chaco Canyon buffer area was \$198.2 million, as well as 31.5 percent of New Mexico's General Fund. Establishing this buffer area will decrease these revenues and negatively impact the economy of not only the area surrounding the proposed buffer area, but also the entire state of New Mexico.

The Committee's presence in New Mexico is more than a symbolic first choice for our first field hearing this Congress. It is a statement that we stand with America, with an energy independent America, and that we support tribal sovereignty and economic self-determination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul A. Gosar" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress