

“The Impacts of Climate Change on Tribal Communities”

OPENING STATEMENT

February 12, 2019

Thank you, Chairman Gallego. As the new subcommittee Republican Leader, I look forward to what I hope will be a positive 116th Congress as we work to address the issues facing Native American tribes and Alaska Natives.

I also want to thank the witnesses for being here today for this hearing.

Access to natural resources can be a lifeline to prosperity and opportunity for Native communities. That’s why this committee has focused in previous congresses on providing greater local control and autonomy to tribes to develop and utilize resources on Native American land.

It is my hope that this committee will continue along this path and avoid the temptation to erect barriers to responsible tribal resource management and use. Eliminating or sharply curtailing the ability of tribes to carry out resource extraction and development on tribal lands would be the wrong approach.

These sorts of proposals would devastate tribal communities that have built their economies around the oil, gas, and coal resources. For example, one tribe relies on coal mining for 88% of its budget and would be left destitute by new restrictions on coal production and use.

Even tribes without significant energy resources would be hit hard by proposals that would increase the cost of coal, oil, and gas. Native Americans in the Midwest and northern plains who already pay a lot to heat their homes would be required to pay even more. Reducing the supply of reliable forms of energy would leave entire regions of the country facing energy poverty. For Native American communities who already face significant economic challenges, this result would be disastrous.

Census figures show the 2017 per capita income for Native Americans to be \$19,824 compared to \$32,397 for the average American. And the Native American poverty rate is 25.4% versus 13.4% for the rest of the country.

This Committee would do well to focus on innovative solutions to address pollution, promote jobs and opportunity for Native Americans and Alaska Natives, and lower – not raise – the costs of energy in tribal communities.

Today's question: How can we reduce pollution and promote a healthier environment, while protecting checkbooks and job opportunities?

In past years, this Committee has explored and passed legislation providing tribes with tools to achieve responsible natural resource management and conservation objectives relating to climate change.

One of the best tools is scientifically sound active forest management undertaken by tribes with substantial forestlands. Tribes have proven to be excellent forest managers, creating healthy forests and removing dangerous fuel that contributes to deadly wildfires and the emission of enormous amounts of carbon dioxide and pollutants.

This Committee should explore why the federal government has not implemented measures enacted by Congress to promote tribal stewardship contracting in mismanaged – or non-managed – federal lands.

When it comes to climate and energy, policies that impose a one-size-fits-all approach will not help tribal economies, especially where certain forms of energy are unreliable or come at great cost to tribal members.

Again, I look forward to discussing how we can find solutions and work together to improve the lives of Native Americans and Alaska Natives.