

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

December 4, 2019

The Honorable Ruben Gallego
Chairman
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples
of the United States
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, District of Columbia 20515

The Honorable Paul Cook
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples
of the United States
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, District of Columbia 20515

Chairman Gallego and Ranking Member Cook, we thank you for holding today's legislative hearing on H.R. 1964, the Lumbee Recognition Act of 2019. This bipartisan bill will finally give the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina the full federal recognition it has long deserved. As the bipartisan sponsors of this bill and members of the North Carolina Congressional Delegation, we respectfully encourage the Members of this Subcommittee to give favorable consideration to H.R. 1964.

The Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina currently consists of around 60,000 members, making it the largest tribe in North Carolina, the largest tribe east of the Mississippi River, and the ninth largest in the nation. In 1885, the Lumbee Tribe was formally recognized by the State of North Carolina, demonstrating the State's close familiarity with the Tribe, its people, and its history. In 1888, the Tribe petitioned Congress for federal education funding, but Congress declined to act largely based on the Department of the Interior's concerns over providing services to such a large tribe.

In 1956, the Lumbee Act was enacted, which recognized the Tribe, but denied the Tribe's eligibility for services and benefits. Again, Congress was persuaded by the Department of the Interior's concerns over providing services to such a large Tribe.

The size of the Lumbee Tribe should not be the detrimental factor standing in the way of its pursuit for full federal recognition. Rather, the merits of their claim, which have long been accepted by the State of North Carolina, academia, and even the federal government, are the proper basis for full federal recognition. Since 1956, there have been many more bills introduced in Congress to fully recognize the Lumbee, but none have been signed into law.

H.R. 1964 extends full federal recognition to the Lumbee and makes its members eligible for the same services and benefits provided to members of other federally recognized tribes. Most importantly, the bill will establish, once and for all, the Lumbee Tribe as an independent and sovereign entity. The bill has bipartisan support in the House, including your colleague, Congressman Don Young, and a similar effort in the Senate was introduced by Senator Richard

Burr of North Carolina and is cosponsored by Senator Thom Tillis of North Carolina. H.R. 1964 also has the full support of North Carolina's Governor, Roy Cooper.


Fair treatment of the Lumbee is not a new topic to be considered by this Subcommittee. Last Congress, this Subcommittee held a hearing on September 26, 2017, that included a similar bipartisan bill to the one before the Subcommittee today, H.R. 3650. We thank the Subcommittee for once again addressing the issue of full federal recognition of the Lumbee, and hope today's legislative hearing will be the last time this issue comes before this Subcommittee.

The Constitution entrusts the Congress with the power to extend government-to-government relationships with Indian tribes. In the case of the Lumbee, it is well past time for Congress to exercise its authority and fully recognize the Lumbee Tribe. It would be unconscionable to leave the decision to decades of administrative review at the Department of the Interior. Now is the time for this Congress to stand on the right side of history by fully recognizing the Lumbee, and today's hearing is a critical step in that process.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's consideration of H.R. 1964 and ask for your support in advancing the bill.

Thank you very much.


G. K. Butterfield
Member of Congress


Richard Hudson
Member of Congress