

**OPENING STATEMENT**

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for travelling here to testify at this hearing.

Today we will be hearing from witnesses on four pieces of legislation that will further our commitment to tribal self-governance and self-determination.

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H.R. 4059, introduced by our colleague from California, Dr. Ruiz, places into trust approximately 2,560 acres of land for the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

The lands of the Agua Caliente are located in and around Palm Springs, California. Over the past few decades, the Tribe has been involved in a series of land transfers with the federal government to consolidate their historic land base and to reclaim certain culturally significant areas.

In 1999, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Tribe came to one such agreement regarding the exchange of remote wilderness lands located within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument.

The agreement was finalized in March of 2019, and the land is currently owned in fee by the Tribe.

H.R. 4059 will officially take this land into trust, allowing the tribe to manage the parcels as conservation lands and helping to consolidate the “checkerboard” landownership around the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation.

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H.R. 4495, again introduced by our colleague from California, Dr. Ruiz, grants the Indian Health Service the authority to purchase private land in order to pave and maintain an access road to the Desert Sage Youth Treatment Center.

Built in 2016, the Desert Sage Wellness Center in Hemet, California benefits the State's many Native communities by providing culturally-sensitive treatment to Native youth battling Substance Use Disorders.

However, due to IHS's unclear authority to purchase and maintain the facility's access road, the Center is currently only accessible by a dirt road that is often washed out from heavy rainfall.

H.R. 4495 will solve this issue by granting IHS the authority to acquire the necessary nearby land in order to build, pave, and maintain an operational access road to the Center.

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H.R. 4888, introduced by Mr. Schrader of Oregon, amends the Grand Ronde Reservation Act to strike language that voids the Tribe's right to bring forth land claims in the State of Oregon.

In the late 1980s, a survey error was discovered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) relating to a section of Grande Ronde lands.

An 84-acre parcel, known as the Thompson strip, was still held in trust for the Tribe, but it was being managed by BLM as if it were not, and as such the agency had been permitting timber to be harvested by private timber companies.

The Tribe deemed the Thompson Strip as unmanageable due to its narrow boundaries and its relation to the other ownership interests, so the Tribe instead sought compensation for the value of the land.

After negotiations, BLM authorized the transfer of 240 acres of other land as compensation for the Thompson Strip. In return, Grand Ronde agreed to relinquish its claims to the Thompson Strip.

When drafting the legislation to codify this agreement, the Interior Department insisted – unbeknownst to the Tribe – on overly broad language that voided any future land claims by Grand Ronde within the entire State of Oregon, overriding the concerns of BLM officials at the time.

The record shows this was not the intent of the legislation, and the Tribe would not have agreed to such a provision had they been made aware.

H.R. 4888 will amend the 1994 Act to ensure that it only applies to claims made against the Thompson Strip, and not the entire State of Oregon.

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Last but definitely not least, we have H.R. 5153, the Indian Buffalo Management Act, introduced by the Dean of the House, Mr. Young from Alaska.

Over the past few decades, tribal nations have actively worked towards the rehabilitation of the American buffalo population on their own lands by participating in inter-tribal alliances such as the InterTribal Buffalo Council, which consists of 61 tribal nations located in 19 states.

H.R. 5153 will build upon this existing initiative by establishing a permanent program within the Department of the Interior to help tribal nations develop and maintain buffalo herds on their own lands.

Through this program, the Interior will award grants to and enter into contractual agreements with any tribal nation that plans to implement buffalo restoration programs and other commercial activities related to buffalo conservation. In addition, the program will enable the transportation of surplus buffalo from federal lands to tribal lands.

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I look forward to hearing all testimony on these bills, and I would now like to recognize the Ranking Member for any opening remarks.