

Rep. Don Young - Opening Statement

Mr. Chairman, thank you for scheduling my bill, the **Indian Buffalo Management Act** for this hearing.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce a witness from my home state who will be testifying. **Melissa Berns** sits on the board of the **Old Harbor Native Corporation**, where she has served since 2016. She resides in Kodiak, Alaska and is a passionate leader in her community. She is a member of Old Harbor Native Corporation's Land Use Committee and Fisheries Committee and has extensive experience with subsistence management. I am glad to have her before the committee.

For hundreds of years, the American buffalo has been central to the culture, spiritual wellbeing, diets, and livelihoods of our nation's Indigenous peoples. Historically, bison were a reliable source of food, shelter, clothing, and economic mobility for Indigenous peoples across the American west.

The tragic decimation of these iconic animals that began in the mid-19th century significantly impacted the Native communities that depended on these majestic creatures. The loss of buffalo populations remains one of the darkest chapters in America's history.

The federal government has a trust responsibility to support the health and well being of Alaska Natives and American Indians. This responsibility includes reversing the damage done not only to buffalo herds, but to the way of life of Native peoples across our country.

Historically BIA has provided a small amount of money each year to promote tribal buffalo management. However, this amount is discretionary, and tribes do not have an assurance that the funding will be available each cycle. This has made it difficult to plan for, and implement, management programs.

My bill solves this problem by creating a permanent program at BIA with an authorization for appropriations. It will assist tribes, tribal organizations, and Alaska Native Corporations with the protection, conservation, and fostering of buffalo herds.

In closing, I would like to thank Rep. Haaland (*HA-LAND*) for introducing this bill with me. I would also like to thank the InterTribal Buffalo Council for their work

on this legislation. I ask unanimous consent to include in the record letters of support I have received from tribes across the country.