

-Legislative Hearing-

**OPENING STATEMENT**

September 23, 2020

Thank you, Chairman Gallego. And thank you to the witnesses for travelling to testify here today.

As you mentioned, the subcommittee will be receiving testimony today on two pieces of legislation.

The first bill, H.R. 7565, would exempt lands held in fee by the Seminole Tribe of Florida from the limitations imposed by Indian Non-Intercourse Act.

As you described, this law restricts an Indian tribe from leasing or conveying any lands a tribe owns without federal approval in the form of a treaty or convention.

The bill would give the Seminole Tribe the legal ability to lease, sell, convey, warrant or transfer any portion of the interest in real property not held in trust.

This Committee has passed several similar measures in recent years.

This does call into question whether this antiquated law is something we should address in a broader manner.

When these types of problems arise, it only causes delays in a tribe's ability to exercise self-determination.

The second bill, H.R. 8255, would ratify and reaffirm the Department of Interior's 2020 decision to place 17-acres of land located in Kings Mountain, North Carolina into trust for the Catawba Nation for gaming purposes.

The tribe is headquartered in Rock Hill, South Carolina and its reservation totals approximately 700 acres.

The Catawba Indian Nation federal recognition was restored in 1993 as part of a land settlement agreement.

In part, this settlement agreement provided a specific structure for the tribe to restore its reservation after losing its original 144,000-acre reservation.

Unfortunately, the 1993 settlement law does contain some ambiguities that fail to provide a clear understanding as to where the tribe may have lands held in trust, what process is required by the 1993 Act and state Act, or whether the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act applies to the Catawba Nation—and where.

It is my hope that today's hearing will be a good first step in analyzing Interior's decision to place the 17 acres in Kings Mountain, North Carolina into trust for the tribe for a gaming facility.

I want to again thank our witnesses and look forward to hearing their testimony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.