

Thank you for holding today's hearing on these several bills.

As more and more Americans become fully vaccinated against COVID-19, I sincerely hope that we can return to in-person hearings soon.

The first bill on today's agenda, H.R. 438, would amend the Alyce Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children Act to provide additional two years for the Commission to complete a report it is required to submit to Congress.

Mr. Young introduced this bill because the Commission did not secure funding it needed until the fall of 2019 and because of the strain the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the Commission's ability to hold hearings and gather important information.

The second bill on our agenda today, is H.R. 2930, the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act, or STOP Act.

This bill expands criminal penalties against those who attempt to sell, or export objects of Native American human remains or items of tribal cultural patrimony. In recent years certain objects have appeared in foreign auction houses.

It bans the export of illegally obtained Native American cultural objects and sets penalties for violations of this ban.

To incentivize repatriation, the bill allows immunity from prosecution if an individual voluntarily surrenders to the appropriate tribe all Native American cultural objects in possession, not less than two years after enactment.

In addition, the bill would require the Government Accountability Office report on the number of Native American cultural objects illegally trafficked, and the extent to which the Department of Justice has prosecuted cases of trafficking.

The GAO must also recommend actions to eliminate trafficking and to secure the repatriation of Native American cultural objects, and the Department of the Interior is directed to convene a Tribal Working Group to enhance the GAO's report and recommendations.

The hearing on this bill today is an important step in ensuring culturally significant items remain with tribes and not in the hands of foreign art dealers.

The final bill on our agenda is a discussion draft sponsored by the full committee chairman, Mr. Grijalva.

The bill would prescribe procedures for consultation between federal agencies and Indian tribes.

Virtually everyone tuned in can agree that many of the best ideas that will impact Indian country, will come from Indian country. After all, Native communities know their needs best.

All voices in each Native community have something to add to the tribal consultation process.

Meaningful consultation is extremely important and is something I fully support, however, there are some questions about the discussion draft that must be fully explored because the bill is broad and in certain respects, ambiguous.

In addition, four hearings have been held in this committee on a previous version of the bill, one in which the Obama Administration testified in opposition stating that the bill quote "has the potential to bring much of the Federal government to a standstill" end quote.

In conclusion, I wish to express my hope we would receive the views of the Department of the Interior, on the bills before us today, as they were not invited to testify.

Failure to obtain testimony from the Administration could create difficulties to move these bills which enjoy much bipartisan support.

Thank you, Madam Chair, and I yield back.