

Rep. TLF 10.05.21 SCIP Opening Statement – Final

Good afternoon and good morning, depending on where you are today. I want to start by welcoming our virtual witnesses and thanking them for joining us today.

We have a full agenda and will hear from bill sponsors, the Administration, and tribal leaders for today's legislative hearing. We have five bills on our docket that are all meant to uplift the health, economic development, and ultimately sovereignty of Tribal Nations and Native Hawaiians. So with that, let's get started in numerical order.

First, we have H.J.Res.55 - the Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalaniana'ole Protecting Family Legacies Act, introduced by our colleague Mr. Kahele from Hawaii.

In 1921, Congress passed the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act, a government-sponsored homesteading program to support Native Hawaiians, as defined through blood quantum.

Since its passage, many homestead beneficiaries have faced obstacles to passing along their ancestral lands to their descendants due to the current program qualifications.

In 2017, the Hawaii State Legislature passed Act 80 to amend the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act to reduce blood quantum requirements for lessee eligibility.

The bill provides the consent of Congress to amend the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act and allow Native Hawaiians greater opportunity to participate in the homestead leasing program. I met with leaders of the Hawaiian homelands last August and understand their desire to see the blood quantum lowered so that their children and grandchildren may receive the benefits intended for their families.

The second bill we will hear is H.R. 441- to provide for the conveyance of certain property to the Tanana Tribal Council located in Tanana, Alaska, and for other purposes, which was introduced by my friend Ranking Member Don Young from Alaska.

This bill directs the Department of Health and Human Services to convey an 11.25-acre parcel to the Tanana Tribal Council, an Alaska Native tribal health and social service consortium that provides outpatient services in interior rural Alaska. The land conveyance will allow the Tanana Tribal Council to expand health facilities and services.

As we heard in our hearing on Federal Facilities in Indian Country, tribal health facilities remain severely underfunded. We must continue to ensure that health facilities can adequately and safely serve our Indigenous communities.

The third bill is H.R. 2402 - The Winnebago Land Transfer Act of 2021, introduced by our colleague Mr. Fortenberry from Nebraska.

This bill is intended to right a wrong committed by the Federal Government, which unfortunately, is all too familiar in our work on this Subcommittee. The Winnebago Reservation was established by the treaty of March 8th, 1865. In the 1970s, without Congressional authorization, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers acquired land from the Winnebago Tribe through eminent domain, despite this land transfer clearly infringing upon the 1865 treaty.

Finally, after decades of disputes, the Winnebago Land Transfer Act of 2021 will rightfully return two tracts of land to the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska to be put into trust to benefit the tribe.

Lastly, we will also hear about H.R. 4881 and H.R. 5221, both introduced by Chair Grijalva.

H.R. 4881, the Old Pascua Community Land Acquisition Act, will integrate a parcel of land to be taken into trust for the benefit of the Pascua Yaqui Tribe.

Earlier this year, the Secretary of the Interior approved Arizona's Amended and Restated Gaming Compact that was signed by the State of Arizona and the Pascua Yaqui Tribe for Class III gaming. This updated compact included the transfer of land into trust for the tribe.

This parcel contains the "Old Pascua" Community in Tucson, Arizona, a sacred ceremonial site for the Tribe. The area is also recognized as the oldest formally established Yaqui community. The bill will allow the Tribe to conduct gaming activities, expand economic development opportunities, and engage in cultural practices on its historical lands.

The bill has bipartisan support from representatives in the State, including support from the City of Tucson, who entered into an Intergovernmental Agreement with the tribe.

And lastly, we will hear about H.R. 5221, the Urban Indian Health Confer Act. Urban Indian organizations, or UIOs, are a pillar of the tribal healthcare system. In fact, 70% of the American Indian and Alaska Natives live in urban areas. Despite the importance and scale of UIO services, IHS is the only agency that maintains a legal obligation to confer with urban Indian organizations.

This bill establishes direct lines of communication between the Department of Health and Human Services and UIOs to ensure effective coordination and mutual understanding, especially when there are significant healthcare policy and initiative changes.

With that, I appreciate my colleagues and witnesses for taking time out of their days to join us. I look forward to hearing more on all the legislation before us.