

**Testimony of Acting Chairwoman Hope Silvas, Shivwits Band of Paiutes  
U.S. House of Representatives — Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs**

***“Making Federal Economic Development Programs Work in Indian Country”*  
Oversight Hearing — February 3, 2026**

Chairman Hurd and distinguished Members of the House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs, my name is Hope Silvas, and I have the honor to serve as Acting Chairwoman of the Shivwits Band of Paiutes (“Shivwits Band”). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at today’s oversight hearing on “*Making Federal Economic Development Programs Work in Indian Country*,” and to share the Shivwits Band’s experiences with federal economic development programs.

The Shivwits Band is a small federally recognized tribe located in present-day southwestern Utah. Like many tribes across Indian country, we have long pursued economic development strategies that align with our size, location, and capacity. This has resulted in smaller projects, including tribal administrative offices, infrastructure development and small-scale commercial enterprises, and land-based economic uses consistent with our cultural values. As a small tribe with limited staff and resources, we must be strategic and cautious in our economic decisions. Unlike larger tribes with diversified revenue streams, we simply cannot risk the margin for error that comes with large-scale or high-risk development projects. In theory, federal economic development programs are meant to support exactly this type of tribal growth. However, in practice, many of these programs have been difficult for the Shivwits Band to access, or are burdened by bureaucratic and administrative delays.

Like many tribes across Indian country, the Shivwits Band is continuously working to create sustainable economic opportunities for our people while honoring our culture, protecting our lands, and exercising our inherent sovereignty. Rather than rely upon infeasible or unreliable federal programming to meet its economic development needs, the Shivwits Band has focused its economic development efforts on things that it can control: its lands, its water, and its contracting with outside investment.

Therefore, these written remarks focus on how federal economic development programs often fail to reach tribes like the Shivwits Band, why many well-intended programs are inaccessible in practice, how these shortcomings have directly impacted the Shivwits Band’s economic development efforts, and how the Shivwits Band has sought Congressional action to address bureaucratic barriers to development.

One of the Shivwits Band’s most significant barriers to use of federal economic development programs is simply a lack of awareness that certain federal programs exist, or how those programs can be adapted (if at all) to meet Shivwits Band needs. Many programs are housed across multiple federal agencies, each with its own terminology, timelines, eligibility criteria, and application processes. Information about these programs is often disseminated through channels that do not reliably reach small tribes, particularly those with limited administrative capacity.

In several instances, the Shivwits Band has become aware of federal programs only after application deadlines have passed, or after funds have already been awarded to other entities. This

is not due to a lack of interest or initiative on our part, but rather a lack of coordinated outreach and communication from federal agencies to tribal governments. When tribes are unaware of programs and their flexibility, we cannot plan projects around them, build partnerships in advance, or align our internal priorities with federal funding opportunities.

Even when the Shivwits Band is aware of federal economic development programs, many are unsuitable for the Shivwits Band, as the programs are not designed with small or rural tribes in mind. Common challenges to the Shivwits Band's access to these types of programs include eligibility requirements that favor large-scale projects, matching fund requirements that are unrealistic for small tribes, scoring criteria that reward prior federal grant success (which disadvantages first-time applicants), and timelines that do not account for individualized tribal decision-making processes or capacity constraints. In some cases, programs are technically "open" to all tribes but are functionally inaccessible to many or most because those programs assume a level of staffing, technical expertise, or financial reserves that small tribes simply do not have. As a result, tribes like the Shivwits Band are often competing at a disadvantage or are discouraged from applying for such programs altogether.

The Shivwits Band has pursued economic development largely through our own resources, partnerships, and incremental growth. Although federal programs have occasionally supported the Shivwits Band's infrastructure or planning efforts, those programs have rarely been a driving force behind any of the Shivwits Band's economic development successes. For instance, although the Shivwits Band has previously utilized the SBA's 8(a) Program, we have been hesitant to rely on a program that is continuously threatened with budget cuts and other issues. Despite criticisms of the 8(a) Program for furthering DEI initiatives, such assessments are inapposite to the program's availability to tribes, because federal law considers Indian tribes to be a governmental, political classification, rather than a race-based classification to which DEI initiatives apply. For these reasons, the Shivwits Band offers its support for the continued availability of the 8(a) Program to tribes.

In some cases, federal economic development programs were not flexible enough to accommodate the smaller scale or nature of the projects that the Shivwits Band was pursuing. In other cases, the administrative burden of compliance outweighed any potential benefits that the funding could bring. This has led the Shivwits Band to rely more heavily on internal planning and conservative development approaches, even when federal programs were theoretically intended to support tribal economic growth. Bureaucratic issues and delays have also led the Shivwits Band to pursue its own federal legislation, the Shivwits Band of Paiutes Jurisdictional Clarity Act (H.R. 3073) in order to strengthen the Shivwits Band's ability to focus its economic development efforts on matters that it can control—its lands, water, and ability to contract with outside investment. H.R. 3073 removes jurisdictional hurdles to the Shivwits Band's economic development and places the Shivwits Band on a level playing field with non-Indian businesses by permitting the Shivwits Band to engage in leases with terms of up to 99 years. We would like to thank Chairman Westerman, Ranking Member Huffman, and all the Members of the Natural Resources Committee for passing this legislation out of committee a few weeks ago, and look forward to its speedy consideration by the full House of Representatives.

Finally, another major obstacle to the Shivwits Band's utilization of federal economic development programming is the administrative burden associated with such programs. For a small tribe like

the Shivwits Band, the same staff members are often responsible for seeking out program opportunities, applications, governance, compliance, grant management, economic planning, and community services—all on top of those staff members' regular job responsibilities. Federal programs frequently require extensive reporting, audits, and compliance measures that stretch our limited capacity. Without sustained technical assistance or long-term support, even well-funded programs can become unmanageable. This discourages participation and limits the effectiveness of federal investments in Indian country.

Based on the Shivwits Band's experiences, we respectfully offer the following recommendations to improve federal economic development programs for tribes:

1. Improve Tribal Outreach and Communication. Federal agencies should proactively and consistently communicate directly with tribal governments about available programs, using clear and accessible language.
2. Design Programs for Tribes of All Sizes. Programs should account for the realities of small and rural tribes, including flexible funding thresholds, reduced matching requirements, and scalable project models.
3. Simplify Application and Compliance Requirements. Streamlining applications and reporting would significantly increase tribal participation and program effectiveness.
4. Provide Technical Assistance and Capacity Building. Long-term technical assistance, and not just pre-award support, would help tribes to successfully implement and sustain economic development projects.
5. Coordinate Across Federal Agencies. Greater coordination would reduce duplication, confusion, and administrative burden while making it easier for tribes to navigate federal resources.

The Shivwits Band wants federal economic development programs to succeed for all tribes, not just the largest and most powerful. The Shivwits Band wants to be a good partner in these efforts, so that we can one day come before this Subcommittee and talk about our successes with the help of federal programs. But for federal programs to truly work in Indian country, those programs must be accessible, transparent, and designed with the diversity of tribal nations in mind. Economic development is a cornerstone of tribal self-determination. When federal programs fail to reach tribes like the Shivwits Band, those programs miss an opportunity to strengthen tribal governments, improve community well-being, and fulfill the federal trust responsibility. For these reasons, the Shivwits Band seeks the legislative fix afforded by the Shivwits Band of Paiutes Jurisdictional Clarity Act, to further our self-determination and independence.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Shivwits Band's experiences. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee to ensure that federal economic development programs truly work for all tribes, including small and rural tribal nations like the Shivwits Band of Paiutes.