Oral Testimony of Talia Martin

Co-Executive Director, Tribal Energy Alternatives

Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs Hearing
"*Tribal Natural Resource Development: Barriers and Successes*"

U.S. Representative, Bruce Westerman

Chairman, House Committee on Natural Resources,

And

U.S. Representative, Jared Huffman

Ranking Member, House Committee on Natural Resources,

Wednesday, April 22, 2026

Chairman Westerman, and Ranking Member Huffman, and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to speak. My name is Talia Martin, I am enrolled member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes from the Fort Hall Indian Reservation, in Idaho. On my maternal side, my families are the Weisers (tuka deka) and Sandys (agai deka) from the Boise Valley, but today I come to you as the Co-Executive Director at Tribal Energy Alternatives, or TEA, an affiliate of GRID Alternatives.

TEA is a Native-led non-profit organization governed by an all-Native Board of Directors, and most of our staff come from the Tribal communities we serve. Our mission is to partner with Tribal Nations across the country to bring renewable energy benefits that advance their energy sovereignty goals, reduce energy costs, and strengthen their community resilience.

Since 2010, we have partnered with over 75 Tribes in 19 states to provide tens of millions of dollars in grants and project funding. We have installed over 8 megawatts of solar energy on residential homes, Tribal government buildings, and community facilities, while also investing in local capacity building. This is evident in our workforce development work, where we provide solar education and training during solar installs, benefiting 500 trained Tribal members. And we believe that energy development should deliver direct benefits to Tribal communities, including lower energy costs, improving reliability, and the preservation of culture and ways of life that strengthen Tribal sovereignty. At TEA, we prioritize working with Tribal communities that face barriers to developing and managing their natural resources for energy generation on their lands.

As this Committee considers Tribal natural resource development, it is important to recognize that the energy system itself is changing. Across the country, we are moving toward a more distributed,

electrified, and dynamic grid. This shift creates new opportunities for local energy development. However, without intentional policy design, Tribal communities already facing higher energy burdens and lower electricity reliability, risk being left out of these systems' changes.

For Tribal communities, energy is not an abstract policy issue. It is about whether electricity is affordable, reliable, and accessible at all.

Barriers and Successes to Tribal Energy Development

In our work with Tribal partners, we consistently see barriers that limit the ability to develop energy projects on Tribal lands. These include limited access to capital, geographic and infrastructure constraints, dueling priorities between the Tribe and utility, and challenges in capturing federal incentives. We also see misalignment between federal program timelines and the realities of Tribal project development.

These challenges are not incidental. They reflect structural gaps in how energy policy, financing, and utility systems are designed; these systems were not built with Tribal communities in mind. As the grid becomes more distributed and integrated with local resources, we see Tribal Nations as leaders in that transition.

Across our work, we have supported Tribal communities in deploying community-scale solar projects that serve both residential homes and Tribal facilities. These projects range in size from approximately 7 kilowatts to 300 kilowatts, often serving between 5 and 45 homes per project, and consistently deliver meaningful outcomes. Some of our most recent work includes projects in Washington, New Mexico, and South Dakota. It is important to note that these projects are intentionally community-scale, designed to deliver direct and measurable benefits to Tribal households and community infrastructure.

For example, in Washington State, we have worked with different Tribal housing authorities and communities to install solar systems that served 46 homes in a single deployment and are generating over $40,000 in annual electricity bill savings, with projected lifetime savings to exceed over $900,000. In other parts of the state, we have deployed additional projects, including another 98-kilowatt system serving 13 homes, designed to deliver $12,000 in annual savings.

In New Mexico, our work includes a 138-kilowatt installation on the Tribes' wellness center, a critical community access building to the Pueblo we worked with, which will generate $14,000 in annual savings. We have worked with more Pueblos within the state to deploy residential projects, and we have been grateful to work with different state agencies to provide technical assistance and grant guidance to one Pueblo, whose residential solar projects were left in the planning phase after Solar for All terminations. We are hopeful that the state will continue to support the work of grant assistance to Tribal and rural communities and see the benefits these projects bring to communities.

I'll end by sharing the project we completed in South Dakota, to show the range of our organization and the states that we've navigated. In partnership with the Tribal housing authority we installed a

148-kilowatt rooftop solar serving 25 Tribal homes and 2 Tribal buildings, generating over $22,000 in annual savings and more than $500,000 in lifetime savings.

And across every single one of these projects, we train Tribal members through hands-on workforce development, ensuring the benefits of these investments extending beyond energy savings into long-term capacity for the Tribe.

These are not pilot projects or one-time demonstrations. These are replicable, cost-effective deployments that are delivering immediate, measurable benefits to Tribal households that do not need years of planning or complex regulatory approval.

Resources for More Impact: Solar for All as a Missed Opportunity

In April 2024, TEA's Western Indigenous Network Solar for All program, or WIN-SFA, received one of six Tribal awards under the $7 billion Solar for All initiative established by the Inflation Reduction Act.

Our program was designed to deploy more than 14 megawatts of residential-serving solar across six Western states, delivering at least 20 percent electricity bill savings to more than 2,900 Tribal households. Participating households were projected to save approximately $94 million in electricity costs over time, or roughly $1,300 per household per year.

Before these benefits could be delivered at scale, the program was terminated in 2025, resulting in the loss of more than $500 million in Tribal-serving investments.

Programs like Solar for All are not only affordability tools; they are foundational investments in a more resilient and distributed energy system. The program loss represents not only lost savings for Tribal households, but also a missed opportunity for Tribes to be included in the next generation of distributed energy infrastructure.

Policy Recommendations

As this Committee considers the future of Tribal natural resource development, we offer the following recommendations:

First, ensure that federal investments intended for Tribal Nations are protected and delivered with certainty.

Second, recognize distributed energy resources, including rooftop solar and battery storage, as critical infrastructure, and provide dedicated support and resources for Tribal deployment.

Third, address utility and interconnection barriers by ensuring that federally supported energy systems are accessible for Tribal projects.

Fourth, expand access to elective pay and financing pathways so that Tribal Nations and Tribal-serving organizations can fully utilize federal incentives.

Finally, continue investing in workforce development tied directly to project deployment, ensuring that energy investments translate into economic opportunities for Tribal communities.

Closing Remarks

At TEA, we invite the Committee to consider a broader definition of what development means. Development should not be measured solely on scale of the resource extraction, but rather by whether it delivers tangible benefits to Tribal households and communities. Distributed energy plays a critical role in what is next for Tribal energy development, and it is demonstrated in a model that works. The opportunity ahead is to ensure federal policy supports and scales these outcomes.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.