



GROWING TRIBAL ECONOMIES. STRENGTHENING TRIBAL FINANCE.

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June 29, 2026

The Honorable Chairman Bruce Westerman
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
202 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chairman Jeff Hurd
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
Natural Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
1641 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Chairman Hurd,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs in support of H.R. 8954, *"Tribal Regulatory Reform Implementation Act of 2026."* I appreciate the committee's interest and willingness to advance legislation that both honors the United States' trust and treaty obligations to and promotes economic sovereignty among Tribal Nations.

I am pleased to provide the following responses to the post-hearing questions for inclusion in the printed transcript.

1. The ITRRBDA was enacted to diversify tribal economies, but 26 years later, we are re-evaluating this provision. Could you speak to the status of this statutory framework?

Fortunately, despite this delay in standing up the Authority, Tribal Nations have been hard at work alongside NAFOA and our partner Tribal Organizations, identifying barriers to investment and Tribal Economic development. The benefit of this statutory framework, though not currently being implemented, is that standing up the Authority is a focused effort to identify additional barriers and, more importantly, solutions that Congress and the Administration can act on.

a. In your opinion, what barriers have contributed to this dormant status?

There are likely a number of factors, including staffing, funding, and competing priorities. Over the last quarter century, Tribes have demonstrated their integral role in sustaining strong regional and state economies and in contributing to the National Economy, in addition to their own Tribal economies.

The intention of S. 614 when it was initially passed was that the Department of Commerce's Native American Business Development Office would implement the new Authority. It was designated as the responsible office in legislation introduced by Sen. Nighthorse Campbell with a similar measure during the 105th Congress, S. 2010. However, that office still currently does not exist.

Additionally, while CBO estimated "implementing S. 614 would have no significant impact on federal spending" during a hearing titled "Business Development on Indian Lands" on May 19, 1999, the Assistant Secretary & Director of Policy at Commerce testified that "[s]ince the cost of the Authority could be significant, I believe it is important to emphasize that the Department cannot currently perform the work required by S. 614 within existing funds." It is noteworthy to consider potential roadblocks to spending as this authority moves forward.

2. Tribal communities face significantly higher rates of poverty, unemployment, and substandard housing compared to the rest of the United States. Besides a lack of capital access, could you speak to the other factors that tribal communities face that lead to these high rates of poverty, unemployment, and substandard housing?

The majority of Tribal Communities are located in rural America. And, as in many rural areas of America, Tribal communities often lack critical infrastructure, resources, access to capital, and other essential elements needed to build strong economies. Compound those limited resources with government red tape, and Tribal Nations face an uphill battle in building their economies. But when barriers are removed, investment is made, and we create a level playing field for Tribal Nations, it is not only Tribal Nations that thrive, but so do the communities around them. Tribal Nations are infrastructure builders, job creators, and economic engines for rural America when they have access to the same tools as their state and local counterparts.

When barriers are removed and federal programs are designed in collaboration with Tribal Nations, outcomes for Tribal Communities, rural America, and the national economy improve.

Respectfully,



Chairman Rodney Butler, President
Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation
NAFOA