



Written Testimony of Ken Ahmann, Colusa Indian Community

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
American Indian/Alaska Native Public Witness Hearing

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Kaptur: On behalf of the Colusa Indian Community, where I serve as Tribal Utility Authority Director and Chief Operating Officer of Colusa Indian Energy, I am pleased to testify in support of a number of programs which support Tribal energy independence and reliability.

The Tribe is located in Northern California and for decades was reliant upon a large investor-owned utility for its energy needs. After experiencing not just increasing costs, but also utility-imposed regional blackouts intended to reduce wildfire risk, our Tribal Council decided to seek energy independence by developing its own microgrid. Through a series of projects, including a cogeneration plant, solar arrays, new distribution, and battery storage, our businesses, casino resort, government campus, homes, businesses, and agricultural operations are all supported by a self-sustaining clean energy system. Our costs have decreased and our Tribal utility hasn't experienced a single power interruption in over 12 years of operation.

After experiencing the benefits of taking our energy future into our own hands, our Tribal Council founded Colusa Indian Energy (CIE), a wholly-owned Tribal corporation, to support other tribes in their pursuit of energy sovereignty. As the only Tribally-owned microgrid developer in the country, CIE has successfully eliminated reliance on external utilities, and is working to assist other Tribes in developing energy independence by providing expertise in microgrid construction, funding opportunities, and public utility authority creation.

My testimony today will focus on those offices, programs, and policies which Tribes rely upon to seek and secure energy independence.

BIA Indian Energy Services/Office of Trust Services

As the members of the Subcommittee know, Tribal governments are forced to seek approval from the Bureau of Indian affairs for a wide array of activities on trust lands, including energy generation, storage, transmission and related projects.

Department of Energy Office of Indian Energy

I also want to recognize the importance of the Office of Indian Energy with the Department of Energy, which we have partnered with on a number of projects at Colusa and elsewhere. The Office of Indian Energy provides technical expertise, funding, and serves as a one-stop shop for tribes seeking to develop their energy resources. These resources were vital in developing our microgrid, and grant funding can help tribes take their initial steps toward energy self-sufficiency.

The House Fiscal Year 2025 Energy and Water bill provides a historic \$95 million to Indian Energy Policy and Programs at the Department of Energy, a 35% million increase over Fiscal Year 2024. We are grateful for your continued support for this office and urge the Committee to continue that commitment as you develop the Fiscal Year 2026 bill.

We hope that those members of the Subcommittee who also serve on the Energy & Water Subcommittee will bring their expertise on tribal issues to that role as well.

Tribal Energy Tax Issues (Scott)

The investment tax credit included in Section 48 of the Internal Revenue Code, which was expanded by Congress in 2022, presented tribes with a critical opportunity to develop microgrid projects on their own reservations, just as Colusa has done. This tax incentive supports solar, wind, geothermal, and co-gen systems, offering cost savings, carbon reductions, and energy reliability. A key feature for Tribes is the direct pay option, allowing tax-exempt entities to receive the credit as a cash payment rather than a tax deduction. This removes financial barriers and enables investment in large-scale renewable projects without requiring tax liability.

While elements of the ITC may have expired at the end of 2024, tribes should be given more time to leverage this funding. Investing in clean energy today will ensure long-term economic and environmental resilience while advancing tribal energy sovereignty.