

**OPENING STATEMENT**

Good morning and thank you to our witnesses for travelling here to testify at this hearing.

Today we will be hearing from witnesses on four pieces of legislation.

-----

The *Yurok Lands Act*, introduced by Mr. Huffman of California, is the result of nearly 20 years of effort by the Yurok Tribe of California.

The purpose of the legislation is to fulfill the intent of the 1988 Hoopa-Yurok Settlement Act and support the Yurok Tribe's sovereignty, self-determination, and involvement in managing its own ancestral lands.

The Act would expand the Yurok Reservation to include lands of significant cultural importance, establish new opportunities for Federal land management cooperation, and ratify and confirm the Yurok Tribe's constitution and governing documents to support sovereignty over its reservation.

-----

The *Safeguarding Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act*, or *STOP Act*, introduced by Mr. Lujan of New Mexico, is a critical piece of legislation aimed at ending the export of illegally obtained tribal cultural heritage items and facilitating their return.

For years, many Tribes have discovered their cultural and sacred objects for sale domestically and abroad, including online and through auction houses.

Under current federal law, it is a crime to traffic in these items.

However, once these items are exported abroad, our government lacks the explicit export restriction and certification system needed to get other countries to work with the United States to facilitate their return.

The STOP Act would fill this gap by strengthening current law to help protect cultural and sacred objects, while establishing a framework to enable the repatriation of items that were exported abroad.

-----

The *Health Care Access for Urban Native Veterans Act*, introduced by Mr. Khanna of California, is short and simple, yet its effect on urban Native American veterans would be significant.

Current federal law allows the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reimburse Indian Health Service facilities for the treatment of Native veterans.

In recent years, urban Indian health organizations have established their own health centers in larger cities, including in my District in Phoenix, in order to accommodate the large populations of tribal members living in urban areas.

However, unlike IHS facilities, these clinics are not currently eligible for VA reimbursement when they treat Native veterans.

We can all agree that Native American veterans should have equal access to health care – regardless of their location – following their military service.

This Act will correct that disparity by expanding VA reimbursement to include urban Indian health centers.

-----

Finally, we will be examining the *Spokane (Spo-CAN) Tribe of Indians of the Spokane Reservation Equitable Compensation Act*, introduced by Senator Cantwell of Washington.

This bill would finally compensate the Spokane Tribe of Indians for the flooding and damage done to their tribal lands as a result of the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam more than 75 years ago.

When the Dam was built, the reservoir it created inundated approximately 2,500 acres of the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington state.

The only other tribe impacted by the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam – the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation – successfully secured a settlement with the United States in 1994 and has been receiving compensation ever since.

The Act will finally address this disparity and compensate the Spokane Tribe for its losses.

-----

I look forward to hearing all of the testimony on these bills, and I would now like to recognize the Ranking Member for any opening remarks.