

SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
CHAIRMAN JOHN HOEVEN

NCAI TRIBAL UNITY IMPACT DAYS
SEPTEMBER 12, 2018

Thank you, President Keel, for that introduction, and for inviting me to address the Tribal Unity IMPACT Days.

Welcome to all tribal leaders, members of the National Congress of American Indians, and distinguished guests and welcome to the Indian Affairs Committee Hearing Room.

I'd like to recognize tribal leaders and members from my home state of North Dakota who have joined us today.

We are heading into the final days of the 115th Congress and have had quite a busy Congress so far. I have enjoyed working with Vice Chairman Udall as well as the other Committee members.

The Committee has passed 29 bills with 18 of those bills passing the Senate. We have also seen 5 bills signed into law. The Committee has also held 30 hearings and has hosted multiple Roundtables on many issues. Some of you here today participated in those events.

However, we still have a lot of work to do in the remaining days of this Congress. Because the issues reach to the heart and soul of tribal communities - the Indian people - the work of Indian country is a solemn responsibility.

I want to take a moment to speak on the legacy of Senator John McCain. Indian Country lost one of its most ardent advocates.

Senator McCain was one of the Committee's longest-serving members. He served on the Committee from 1987 until 2018 and served as Chairman of the Committee from 1995 to 1996 and again from 2005 until 2006.

He worked tirelessly on behalf of Indian Country, particularly Indian children. He strongly believed the federal government has a solemn duty to meet its trust obligation to Native Americans and was a big believer in accountability to all. He was also a champion for tribal self-governance and self-determination.

He will be missed.

As Chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, and a member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, supporting agricultural production in Indian Country is one of my top priorities. As a Conferee on the Farm Bill, I will continue to voice Indian country's priorities in the bill conference process, including calling for the

final farm bill to include provisions from my bipartisan CROPS for Indian Country Act.

Two notable tribal provisions in the Senate Farm Bill, among several, would further the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the USDA by establishing a self-determination pilot project for administering the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations. Additionally, tribal agriculture policy will be improved at the Department through the creation of a USDA Tribal Advisory Committee to provide technical assistance to the Secretary of Agriculture.

We're getting close, but the work is not over. Keep up the unity – now is not the time to distract attention from these key pieces in the Senate bill. I am working hard to preserve the Indian provisions from the Senate version in the final measure. I want to thank the tribes and the Native American Farm Bill Coalition for their diligent efforts on this bill.

Expanding tribal program administration is part of the Committee's efforts in supporting tribal self-determination and self-governance. Tribes should be empowered to create their own destinies and tailor programs to meet their needs.

To that end, I introduced the PROGRESS for Indian Tribes Act to improve the tribal self-governance process. This bipartisan bill is poised to pass the Senate so we need to ramp up efforts to get it through the House and on to the President this year.

Tribal prosperity goes hand in hand with self-governance. The Indian Country Economic Enhancement Act is intended to facilitate economic development in Indian Country. It supports procurement initiatives through the Buy Indian Act. It helps tribes conduct master planning and build support for Community Development Financial Institutions which, as you may know, may be the only source of capital for local businesses. I urge tribes to engage House leadership in getting this bill to the President this year.

As a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I have worked to obtain funding for these critical programs for Indian Country. As a conferee on the Interior Appropriations Conference Committee, I will be working hard to maintain support for the increases in the Senate bill which include:

- Funding for Indian Irrigation Systems, the Indian loan guarantee program, and critical public safety and justice programs and Bureau of Indian Education programs.

- Funding for hospitals, health clinics, alcohol and substance use disorder prevention programs.

I want to point out that the funding for the IHS Indian health profession program addresses critical mental health needs. Two of these key programs are administered in my home state of North Dakota and are intended to increase the number of behavioral health professionals in Indian Country.

Under this Congress, tribes have seen historical funding levels for tribal housing programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, including \$100 million in competitive tribal housing grants, \$655 million for the Indian Housing Block Grant, and \$68 million for the Indian Community Development Block Grant – altogether we've provided a grand total of \$823 million dedicated to much needed housing.

The Senate has also taken action to improve housing programs for Native American veterans. As many of you know, Indian service members have enlisted in the armed services at a higher rate per capita than any other ethnic group. We can honor their sacrifice by ensuring that they have safe and affordable housing after their service to this country is complete. The bipartisan tribal HUD-VASH bill is awaiting further action from the House, but I am confident our work together can get this bill to the President this year as well.

As Chairman, I support all the Indian Affairs bills that have passed the Senate. Therefore, I have taken the liberty to provide a 1 page list of ALL the bills waiting action over at the House of Representatives. This list has been given to NCAI to distribute for your advocacy.

Thank you again for the invitation to speak with you. I am humbled to serve as Chairman of this committee, and I wish you all a productive legislative conference.
