

CONGRESSMAN

PAUL GOSAR

Representing the 1st District of Arizona



HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE AFFAIRS

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3973 – Native American Energy Act (Young-AK)

February 15, 2012 - 2:00 p.m.

I want to welcome today's witnesses, all of whom are tribes that are actively engaged in the exploration, development, and production of both conventional and emerging energy resources.

The Native American Energy Act contains common-sense measures to streamline and promote Native American energy and other natural resources development. It continues our efforts in this Congress to reduce the role of the Federal government in Indian life, strengthen tribes and businesses, and encourages Indian people to make their own decisions and be governed by them.

Specifically, the bill reduces bureaucratic burdens, reduces frivolous lawsuits that delay or prohibit critical economic development projects, lowers the cost on tribes to permit on their trust lands, and increases tribal sovereignty by providing additional opportunities for tribes to control their own destiny when it comes to energy development on their lands.

This bill is a result of intensive consultation with tribes across the country that are involved in energy exploration, development, and production. It contains measures that tribes requested of the Committee, rooted in the principle of increasing Native Americans' control over their lands' resources. These tribes know best, because they must live with the status quo that is stifling their economic prosperity.

I am particularly proud of the provision that will allow Navajo Nation to assume responsibility for its subsurface leasing program. Given the vast supply of coal, oil, and natural gas on the Navajo Reservation, there is enormous opportunity for the Nation to create jobs and provide revenues for the Navajo and surrounding communities. Given the staggering rate of poverty and unemployment on the reservation today, the question about this initiative should not be "why" but instead, "how quickly can we set this in motion"? Facilitating this new responsibility for the Nation will contribute to the principles of self determination that many on this Committee have worked diligently to advance, as well as further the economic and energy security that our nation so desperately needs.

Before I recognize the Ranking Member for any opening statement he may have, I would like to thank my friend Wilson Groen of the Navajo Nation Oil and Gas Company. As the Member of Congress that represents the majority of the Navajo Nation, I have met with him in the past to discuss barriers to energy development on Native American lands. I am pleased to have him here testifying in support of the bill.

Second, I want to note for the record that the Subcommittee invited the Secretary of the Interior or his designee to testify. The Department declined, even though the Department agreed to testify tomorrow in the Senate in an oversight hearing on Indian energy.

This is the second time in this Congress that the Department has refused to testify in this Committee on a bill for Native Americans. The first was the Subcommittee's hearing on H.R. 887, another bill I have cosponsored with the Chairman to reduce the outrageous \$99 million the Department agreed to take from the pockets of individual Indians, to pay the lawyers in the *Cobell v. Salazar* Settlement Agreement.

I am disappointed in the Department's disregard not only for the Members of the Subcommittee, but for our witnesses. Many of them flew long distances from their homes and families to testify today.

But I am not discouraged. Whether the Department realizes it or not, its failure to appear today underscores the problems that tribes live with every day.

The Administration's failure to show up today will not hold up progress on this bill. Chairman Young and I are committed to moving this proposal forward quickly so Congress can provide our Native American and Alaskan Native constituents relief from federal barriers that prohibit energy development on THEIR land. If the Administration is serious about its commitment to "encouraging economic development in Indian Country and honoring trust responsibilities," as Interior Secretary Salazar testified today in the full committee's oversight hearing on the FY2013 budget, they will work with Chairman Young and I to ensure our bill becomes law.