



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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Witnesses Agree on the Need for Increased Tribal Self-Governance *Support efforts to improve local economies, create jobs in Indian Country*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs held a [legislative hearing](#) on [H.R. 4350](#), the *Northern Cheyenne Lands Act*, and [H.R. 409](#), the *Indian Trust Asset Reform Act*. These two bills would allow for increased tribal control of trust assets and fulfill a long-standing federal promise to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe in Montana.

“Unemployment rates on the Northern Cheyenne reservation are around 60%. And, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe has called the Lame Deer area home for thousands of years but lacks the freedom to control their own future. The Northern Cheyenne Lands Act is necessary to address these concerns, to facilitate consolidation of the reservation and more tribal control for economic development on reservation lands, and to protect their sacred sites,” **said Congressman Steve Daines (MT-at large).**

Witnesses at today’s hearing reiterated that Indian tribes are better equipped to manage their own lands, trust assets, and mineral resources than the federal government, which has long practiced a paternalistic approach to tribal affairs resulting in high unemployment, poverty, and community health problems.

H.R. 4350, the *Northern Cheyenne Lands Act*, would authorize a land exchange enabling the Northern Cheyenne Tribe to acquire 5,000 acres of privately-owned subsurface lands on the Tribe’s reservation.

- Northern Cheyenne Tribe President [Llevando “Cowboy” Fisher](#) said that if this legislation is enacted the tribe’s *“ability to control its land, mineral resources, and trust funds will be greatly enhanced. This will improve the Tribe’s ability to self-govern and control its own destiny and will provide sorely needed economic development opportunities.”* Underscoring the importance of this legislation, Llevando added, *“We implore Congress and the Administration to do the right thing and enable the Northern Cheyenne to control their own lands and trust funds, and therefore control their own destiny.”*

H.R. 409, the *Indian Trust Asset Reform Act*, would allow greater flexibility in tribal management of tribally-owned trust assets. This legislation would also restructure the

Bureau of Indian Affairs to ensure greater accountability and transparency to ensure that the agency is working in the best interests of Indians across America.

- Coeur d'Alene Tribe Vice Chairman [Ernest L. Stensgar](#) testified before the Subcommittee that *"Indian tribes have demonstrated that they are in a better position to manage their affairs than the federal government."* Stensgar added, *"Currently, the BIA is the final decision-maker on these issues. If enacted into law, tribes for the first time would have the flexibility to dictate these management standards."*
- National Congress of American Indians Chief Counsel [David A. Mullan Jr.](#) specifically spoke to the negative economic effects of the federal government's current policy on tribal affairs. *"Tribal governments have become much more sophisticated and after decades of adherence to the tribal self-determination policy, requiring an independent review and approval of all tribal decisions is demeaning, unnecessary, and absolutely an impediment to economic development in Indian Country."*

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