

TESTIMONY OF DAVID CONRAD
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
REGARDING TRIBAL ENERGY DOMINANCE HEARING
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INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chair Murkowski, Vice Chair Schatz, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the invitation to testify. My name is David Conrad. I am a citizen of the Osage Nation, and I am proud to serve as Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Office of Indian Energy. I believe I am the first Deputy Director to appear before this Committee. Since 2011, the leadership positions in the Office, including Deputy Director, were term-limited, forcing a reset with each new administration. I am excited that in 2023 the position of Deputy Director became a permanent excepted service position, strengthening the continuity we provide to Indian Country. Achieving this continuity has not been easy and is a testament to the sustained commitment and vision of Tribal leadership.

Twenty years ago, this Committee was instrumental in passing the Indian Tribal Energy Development and Self-Determination Act, a key component of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, establishing the Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs within the Department of Energy (DOE).

As I believe all of you know, that achievement was the culmination of decades of work. From the first oil wells drilled on Indian land in Oklahoma during the early 1900's to the formation of the Council of Energy Resource Tribes in 1976, Tribal leadership has worked with government, industry, and others to create the partnerships necessary to bring us all here today.

The vision for our Office was established in law: it charges us to promote Tribal energy development, efficiency, and use; reduce and stabilize energy costs; enhance and

strengthen Tribal energy and economic infrastructure; and bring electrical power and service to Indian lands and homes (42 U.S.C. § 7144e). I am happy to share that this vision continues to be carried out under President Trump's and Secretary Wright's leadership, with key initiatives to ensure that Tribes are poised to unleash their own energy resources, including identifying additional DOE resources for our partners in the Arctic Energy Office.

Congress also directed the Office to carry out its work in accordance with the long-standing principle of Tribal Self-Determination, first codified in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, during the Ford Administration. The Senate recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of that law. The principle, simply put, tells us that Tribes know best how to implement the programs and projects intended to benefit their citizens. We hold this principle in mind as we support an agenda of energy dominance.

To pursue Tribal energy priorities, Tribes have used multiple pathways to deploy energy solutions. These include creating Tribal Utility Authorities; incorporating energy deployment in government operations and in housing developments; and incorporating energy deployment in their economic enterprises from grocery stores to gaming operations. Tribes have also used multiple approaches to securing resources for energy projects -- including federal and state grants, loans, Tribal assets, and commercial finance options. Through the Office of Indian Energy's Navigator service, we help Tribes find the funding opportunities which best fit their needs.

THE IMPACT OF THE OFFICE OF INDIAN ENERGY

The Department of Energy has been faithfully implementing our statute for the last 20 years by supporting Tribes to develop and pursue their energy visions. Since 2010, we have supported over 240 Tribal energy projects, encompassing energy planning and the deployment of microgrids, new power generation, and efficiency upgrades to buildings to reduce energy costs and improve reliability. For each of these 240+ projects, Tribes proposed the technologies they wanted to pursue, competed for the award, and contributed cost-share. Tribes continue to lead on the implementation, and they continue to maintain the projects ensuring they deliver for years to come. To date, the energy performance of 11,000 buildings has been improved -- and these buildings are now lowering energy costs for Tribes every day. Across all Indian Energy deployment projects, Tribal governments and citizens are projected to save \$530 million. These projects have been predominantly in rural and remote areas, creating ripple effects which often benefit neighboring communities through reduced burden on their grids, delivery of essential services during emergencies, and cheaper power through energy addition.

These projects have increased Tribal capacity to operate in the energy sector, while injecting much needed innovation into rural and remote development and demonstrating the strong capabilities of Tribes in the energy sector. I'll briefly touch on three examples: First, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa just completed a biomass heating system to heat their Brookston community center near Cloquet, Minnesota by using local wood waste products and leveraging their own technical expertise on the unique set of required feeders and boilers. The system is projected to save \$31,000 per year. Second, Kawerak Inc, an intertribal organization, is installing an organic rankine cycle turbine, a novel alternative to a steam turbine, to generate firm power from their geothermal resources in Pilgrim Hot Springs, Alaska. And finally, the Village of Igiugig, Alaska is installing a unique run-of-river hydropower system which is projected to add 35 kW of power generation for 33 homes and buildings. These projects were selected for support based on the Tribe's resources, robust analysis, and Tribal self-determination. With this support, these small communities are charting new paths to ensure that reliable and affordable energy reaches every corner of America.

Additionally, the Office of Indian Energy has fulfilled well over 500 requests for technical assistance by giving Tribes access to our national labs and associated experts, facilitating the advancement of energy projects with strategic planning and resource analysis.

RECENT INITIATIVES UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

We continue to gain momentum under President Trump's and Secretary Wright's leadership. In the past, the Office of Indian Energy has focused heavily on community scale energy. This critical work continues as we support Tribes in developing any energy source which, through robust analysis, is shown to support reliable and affordable power. Today, we also look beyond community scale projects to ensure that Tribal Nations are poised to share in the prosperity of unleashing American energy (E.O. 14154) through their self-determined paths. We are doing this by leveraging strategic partnerships:

- In March 2025, the Office of Indian Energy partnered with the U.S. Department of Commerce to extend the Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP) to work with Tribal Nations on energy development. This additional technical assistance supports Tribes in advancing high-value energy projects, such as data centers, critical minerals development, and new generation and transmission infrastructure. The assistance is designed to help Tribes structure energy deals and establish legal frameworks to enhance energy sector commerce. The program is already serving multiple Tribal partners.
- Additionally, in collaboration with DOE offices, eleven new Energy Innovator Fellows have been placed in Tribal host institutions this year. This is the largest number of

fellows at Tribal hosts of any cohort to date. These fellows will collaborate with Tribes to modernize power systems, enhance energy infrastructure for industry, and contribute to a more reliable, affordable, and resilient U.S. power system. These fellows are expanding the capacity of the Tribal energy ecosystem.

- Finally, the Office of Indian Energy has expanded our Tribal Energy Navigator Service. This service responds to inquiries from Tribes developing energy projects and facilitates more efficient access to DOE and the other federal energy programs available to them.

These recent initiatives elevate existing federal resources, while collectively building a foundation of trust and predictability for Indian Country to unleash their own vast energy resources to participate in the broader regional and national energy economy.

Achieving affordable, reliable, and secure energy is not without its challenges. Energy development can be demanding, especially for many Tribes with small staff, where each employee wears multiple hats. Tribes must create new regulations, run request for proposals, and negotiate interconnections, off-take agreements, and rights-of-way, all while constantly educating others about their sovereignty and history. It takes time to get projects right. But Tribes are up for this challenge, and the momentum for energy security has only continued to grow.

THE UNIQUE CIRCUMSTANCES OF ALASKA

I want to focus on Alaska for a moment as Alaska presents its own unique opportunities and challenges. Due to its harsh climate, remoteness, and historic laws like the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), Alaska stands distinct from the reservation system in the lower forty-eight. Secretary Wright acknowledged the long running history and sovereignty of Alaska Natives, and the rights of Native Alaskans to develop their own energy resources, when he visited the Village of Utqiagvik this past June. To account for the unique circumstances of Alaska, the Office of Indian Energy works closely with key partners in Alaska to ensure remote communities have fair access to the full suite of Tribal and programmatic resources of DOE. The Offices of Indian Energy and Arctic Energy have co-located their workspaces in Anchorage to facilitate interoffice cooperation and collaborative community engagement. The Arctic Energy Office continues to focus on engagement with Alaska Native regional and village corporations across the entire state, and these ANCSA corporations remain eligible for Office of Indian Energy assistance.

Evidence shows these efforts have been effective. Since 2010, approximately 28% of deployment funding and approximately 42% of all technical assistance from the Office of Indian Energy has gone to Alaska, where 40% of all Federally recognized Tribes in the

United States reside. This technical assistance is delivered in collaboration with the Denali Commission and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium to ensure the unique circumstances of Alaska are being considered.

THE WORK AHEAD

For a generation, Congress has allowed the Office of Indian Energy to support Tribal Nations in a sustained effort to address high energy costs and bolster critical energy infrastructure in their communities. The achievements that Tribes have made along the way underscore this committee's foresight and the power of Tribal self-determination.

That said, we recognize there is still work to be done. Our work in support of 240 Tribal energy projects is modest in comparison to 574 federally recognized Tribes, many of which govern over multiple communities, and the issues of reliability and affordability that plague the Nation's grid are acutely felt in Indian Country. Tribal communities face electricity outages approximately six and a half times more frequently than the U.S. average.¹ It is well known that many Tribes are at the end of the distribution lines, on poor performing circuits, or lack grid access altogether. Compounding this challenge, Tribal households allocate a disproportionately high portion of their income to energy costs, an amount that is four times greater than the national average.² These critical findings were detailed in a 2023 Report on Tribal Energy Access and Reliability, submitted to Congress by the Office of Indian Energy, and these remain persistent challenges today.

The Office of Indian Energy, in partnership with Tribal Nations and other federal agencies, is committed to maximizing the impact of federal investments to address these challenges, and we look forward to continuing this essential work in collaboration with this committee.

¹ NREL LEAD Tool; [Tribal Energy Access and Reliability Report to Congress -2023](#)

² [Tribal Energy Access and Reliability Report to Congress -2023](#); Self-reported Indian Energy grant applicant data; Indian Country Energy and Infrastructure Working Group. (2020, August 7). Tribal Energy COVID-19 Survey.