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Testimony of the United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund
For the Record of the House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs Hearing on
"Making Federal Economic Development Programs Work in Indian Country"

The United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) is pleased to provide the House Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs with the following testimony for the record of the February 3, 2026 hearing on "Making Federal Economic Development Programs Work in Indian Country." This hearing focused on identifying federal policies, procedures, and regulations that create barriers to Tribal Nations pursuing economic opportunity. The federal government offers a range of programs to promote Tribal economic development, business incubation, lending, contracting, and infrastructure development. However, the pursuit of these projects is often constrained by lengthy approval processes, complicated applications, rules, and reporting requirements, and limited funding opportunities.

The federal government has an obligation to support Tribal Nations as we exercise our sovereignty and self-determination to create viable and sustainable economic opportunities and job creation for our communities. However, the management and funding systems of many federal programs operate under an archaic model of paternalism that does not support Tribal Nation inherent sovereignty and self-determination. Indeed, there are several Tribal-specific priorities that must be addressed by Congress to empower Tribal Nations, but there must also be firm recognition and acknowledgement that Tribal Nations exercise inherent sovereignty to address our economic priorities. Therefore, while the federal government may provide programs, services, and the means to address these issues, ultimately there must be deference to our governing bodies and the Tribal laws that drive our pursuit of economic sovereignty, furthering our efforts to pursue Nation building and rebuilding.

USET SPF is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization advocating on behalf of thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations from the Northeastern Woodlands to the Everglades and across the Gulf of Turtle Island.[1] USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

Congress should focus on fulfilling several short term objectives such as amending statutes to authorize long-term leasing on trust lands (recognizing our inherent sovereignty to make such decisions),

[1] USET SPF member Tribal Nations include: Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas (TX), Catawba Indian Nation (SC), Cayuga Nation (NY), Chickahominy Indian Tribe (VA), Chickahominy Indian Tribe–Eastern Division (VA), Chitimacha Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (NC), Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians (ME), Jena Band of Choctaw Indians (LA), Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe (CT), Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe (MA), Miccosukee Tribe of Indians of Florida (FL), Mi'kmaq Nation (ME), Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MS), Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut (CT), Monacan Indian Nation (VA), Nansemond Indian Nation (VA), Narragansett Indian Tribe (RI), Oneida Indian Nation (NY), Pamunkey Indian Tribe (VA), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township (ME), Passamaquoddy Tribe at Pleasant Point (ME), Penobscot Indian Nation (ME), Poarch Band of Creek Indians (AL), Rappahannock Tribe (VA), Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe (NY), Seminole Tribe of Florida (FL), Seneca Nation of Indians (NY), Shinnecock Indian Nation (NY), Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana (LA), Upper Mattaponi Tribe (VA), and the Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) (MA).

strengthening the Indian Loan Guarantee Program, and protecting the 8(a) program and Community Development Financial Institutions Fund. In the long term, the Congress must look to addressing tax parity and dual taxation issues, expansion of self-governance across the federal government, strengthening the 477 program, restoring Tribal homelands, and investment in a "Marshall Plan" for Tribal Nations. Through targeted efforts to reform and revise certain federal statutes and regulations, the federal government can remove longstanding obstacles that have stifled economic opportunity, job creation, and community development on Tribal lands.

Strengthen the BIA Indian Loan Guarantee Program

The Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) Indian Loan Guarantee Program (ILGP) provides critical financing for Indian Country economic development by reducing risk to lenders—including Native Community Development Financial Institutions—that offer loans to Tribal Nations and Native entrepreneurs. Under the program, lenders can obtain a guarantee or insurance up to 90% of the amount they finance, which minimizes risk and ensures the affordable financing they provide directly benefits Indian Country. In addition, the ILGP has one of the lowest default rates among all federal loan guarantee programs and these loan guarantee programs should work for Tribal Nations, especially the energy financing programs. For fiscal year (FY) 2026, Congress appropriated $13.3 million for ILGP loan guarantees and insurance and significantly increased to $227.3 million the total value of loan principal that may be guaranteed or insured for operations, equipment, acquisition and refinancing, building construction, and lines of credit.

Congress's FY 2026 appropriation for the ILGP was done in recognition of the importance of this program to Indian Country, rejecting the BIA's FY 2026 Budget Request, which called for elimination of the program citing it as, "duplicative of several other programs across the [federal government] that offer loans to small businesses and which Tribal businesses are eligible for and receive." Moving forward, USET SPF recommends that Congress strengthen this successful program by providing it with the necessary annual appropriations. Congress should also direct the Administration to increase ILGP staffing, streamline burdensome ILGP regulations, and enhance capital financing for infrastructure development projects—which should include the acquisition of existing infrastructure for broadband and energy services. Implementing these changes will enable ILGP to positively impact many more Tribal communities across Indian Country by increasing lending opportunities for Tribal Nations and lands, which are severely underbanked and underfinanced.

Amend the Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955 to Authorize 99-Year Leases

Congress enacted the Long-Term Leasing Act of 1955 (LTLA) to empower Tribal Nations to enter into surface leases, with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, for a period of 25 years with the option to renew such leases for an additional 25 years. However, the current 25-year lease restriction imposed by the LTLA and the archaic federal practices of managing Tribal lands do not support our inherent sovereignty and self-determination. This is especially evident in the lease restrictions imposed by statutes and regulations that limit Tribal Nation authorities to effectively pursue land use planning and development for Nation building and rebuilding.

Under the 1834 Non-Intercourse Act, Tribal Nations are prohibited, unless explicitly authorized by an Act of Congress, to engage in transactions of lands held in trust by the federal government. In 1955, Congress enacted the Long-Term Leasing Act (LTLA) to authorize Tribal Nations to enter into surface leases, with the approval of the Secretary of the Interior, for a period of 25 years with the option to renew such leases for an additional 25 years. The LTLA was amended in 2012 by the Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Home Ownership (HEARTH) Act, which empowered Tribal Nations to negotiate and enter into surface leases once their HEARTH Act regulations were approved by the Secretary of the Interior. This

process streamlines Tribal Nation lease transactions as well as empowers Tribal Nations to exercise self-determination in developing and implementing our own leasing and land use priorities. According to the Department of the Interior, as of April 2025, 121 Tribal Nations have adopted their own HEARTH Act regulations to lease trust lands. However, the limitations of the LTLA's 25-year leasing authority have limited Tribal Nation abilities to attract capital and business entities to enter into these lease agreements.

Today, lease authority of up to 99 years is often required for long term commercial leases and some financing contracts from banking institutions. Additionally, the HEARTH Act is currently limited since it does not recognize the authority of Tribal Nations to authorize rights-of-way approvals across Tribal lands once Tribal Nation regulations are approved by the Secretary of the Interior. Amending the HEARTH Act to empower Tribal Nations with regard to rights-of-way permitting will streamline infrastructure project approval and deployment processes and ensure projects are not delayed while waiting for approval of rights-of-way applications at DOI. This authority will become extremely beneficial to Tribal Nations in working with federal and non-federal entities for the deployment of infrastructure projects.

Tribal Nations are sophisticated and focused on determining the best land use planning, development, and management activities to pursue economic and community development projects and other initiatives to improve the general welfare of our citizens and communities. As sovereign Tribal Nations, we are best suited to manage leasing and development activities on our lands without federal interference. The current legal barriers that have prevented or unduly prolonged Tribal Nations from executing long-term leases of Tribal lands must be addressed by Congress. By amending the LTLA to authorize Tribal Nation authority to conduct leases of trust lands for a period of up to 99 years, Tribal Nations will no longer have to rely on approval by an Act of Congress to offer and enter into long term leases for periods beyond the current 25-year leasing threshold authorized by the LTLA. It will also ensure that all Tribal Nations can negotiate effectively to execute these long-term leases and compete with non-Tribal landholders near our jurisdictional boundaries.

USET SPF urges the Subcommittee to consider legislation that would empower Tribal Nations to execute long-term leases of trust lands and the authority to develop rights-of-way regulations to execute these permits across Tribal lands to facilitate the deployment of critical economic and community development projects. Enactment of such legislation will support the building and rebuilding of Tribal Nations by expediting Tribal economic development plans on trust lands, as well as other initiatives Tribal Nations may pursue for the general welfare of our citizens and communities.

Support the Expansion of ISDEAA Contracting and Compacting Across the Federal Government for Tribal Nations

As the Subcommittee well knows, Tribal Nations are political, sovereign entities whose status stems from the inherent sovereignty we have as self-governing peoples that pre-dates the founding of the United States. The U.S. Constitution, treaties, statutes, executive orders, and judicial decisions all recognize that the federal government has fundamental trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations, including the obligation uphold the right to self-government. Our federal partners must fully recognize the inherent right of Tribal Nations to fully engage in self-governance, so we may exercise full decision-making in the management of our own affairs and governmental services.

Despite the success of Tribal Nations in exercising authority under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), the goals of self-governance have not been fully realized. Many opportunities still remain to improve and expand upon the principles of self-governance and self-determination. An expansion of ISDEAA authorities to all programs across the federal government would

be the next evolutionary step in the federal government's recognition of Tribal sovereignty and reflect its full commitment to Tribal Nation sovereignty and self-determination. The expansion of self-governance contracting and compacting will not only empower us to better serve our citizens and communities, but it will enhance our abilities to manage our lands. It would empower Tribal Nations to administer federal programs in co-management, stewardship, agriculture, deployment and maintenance of critical infrastructures, and pursue economic development on our lands. It is time for Congress to enact legislation that expands our self-governance capabilities across the federal government so that we may fully exercise our inherent sovereign rights to manage our affairs and resources.

Support for Strengthening and Expanding Funding Mechanisms Like the 477 Program

USET SPF believes strengthening and expanding the 477 Program, and creating similar funding mechanisms, will be life-changing for Tribal communities and revolutionary for the delivery of the United States' trust and treaty obligations. The 477 Program as it exists today aggregates funding from diverse federal programs each designed to support the self-sufficiency of Tribal community members, discussed further below.[2] We believe the lessons we have learned from the PL 477 Program could be applied to many other subject matter areas, increasing the efficiency of federal dollars and Tribal self-determination.

The bedrock principle of the 477 Program is to enable Tribal Nations to exercise our inherent sovereignty in our use of federal funds by improving flexibility and removing the obstacles preventing us from utilizing that funding to best respond to the needs of our communities. The 477 Program allows Tribal Nations to pool and reallocate federal funding integrated into 477 plans across the services provided through that 477 plan. 25 U.S.C. §§ 3413(a)(1)(A), (a)(2), 3410(b)(3). The 477 statute creates authority to waive integrated programs' statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements that hamper streamlined operation. *Id.* § 3406(d). Further, once a program is integrated into a 477 plan, the 477 statute replaces the various reporting requirements tied to those integrated programs with just one comprehensive annual report on implementation of the 477 plan. *Id.* § 3410(a)(2)(A), (b).

The 477 statute sets forth three criteria that define the universe of programs eligible for integration under the 477 Program. First, the program must be operated by one of the 12 covered federal agencies. *See id.* § 3404(b). Second, the program must be implemented for one of the covered purposes, which are designed to be broad so that they encompass not just employment and training programs but also related supportive services designed to establish self-sufficiency. *Id.* § 3404(a)(1)(A). Third, in order for a program to be eligible for integration into a 477 plan, it must receive a covered type of funding. *Id.* § 3404(a)(1)(B), (a)(2). When a program meets the three eligibility criteria, as determined by the Department of the Interior (DOI), *id.* § 3407(a), it is eligible for integration into a 477 plan. Disapproval of a program for integration is only lawful when supported by a notice, in writing, that "contains a specific finding that clearly demonstrates, or that is supported by a controlling legal authority, that the plan does not meet the requirements described in [the section of the 477 statute containing the program eligibility criteria].'" *Id.* § 3407(b)(3).

Despite the longstanding success of the 477 Program, DOI in 2025 began disapproving programs already previously integrated and successfully operated within Tribal Nations' 477 plans, and these disapprovals are not based on the eligibility criteria found within the 477 statute itself. The 477 Program only works when DOI is willing to educate sister agencies and exercise its statutory authority to ensure compliance. This is

[2] The PL 477 Program is authorized by the Indian Employment, Training, and Related Services Demonstration Act of 1992, known commonly as Public Law 102-477, as amended in 2000 by Public Law 106-568 and again in 2017 by Public Law 115-93, now codified at 25 U.S.C. §§ 3401–3417.

because staff in some of the covered federal agencies have consistently resisted the 477 Program, including by unlawfully exercising veto authority over integration of eligible programs they would prefer to operate themselves or by refusing to transfer funds. These staff love their programs, and they are not used to working with Tribal Nations and deferring to and trusting Tribal sovereignty and the different, self-determined ways Tribal Nations wish to adapt these programs to most effectively meet the needs of our communities. Instead of working with Tribal Nations and DOI to address implementation, these agencies fight to keep control over their programs, even if it means violating the mandates of the 477 statute. Congress has always played a key role in encouraging the agencies to comply with the 477 statute, and we need your help now.

USET SPF is invested in seeing the 477 Program succeed, be implemented to the maximum extent permissible under the law, and be replicated for other types of federal programs. As USET SPF pointed out in our 2022 publication, *Marshall Plan for Tribal Nations*, the 477 Program is a model for flexible funding delivery to Tribal Nations that fosters creative success. The 477 Program is one step toward a future in which Tribal Nations have the room necessary to allocate *our* funds where most useful as a sovereign government should.

Support the Restoration of Tribal Homelands and Enact a 'Carcieri Fix'

Possession of a land base is a core aspect of sovereignty, cultural identity, and represents the foundation of a government's economy. This is no different for Tribal Nations. USET SPF Tribal Nations continue to work to reacquire our homelands, which are fundamental to our existence as sovereign governments and our ability to thrive as vibrant, healthy, self-sufficient communities. The federal government's objective in the trust responsibility and obligations to our Nations must be to support healthy and sustainable self-determining Tribal governments, which fundamentally includes the restoration of lands to all federally recognized Tribal Nations, as well as the legal defense of these land acquisitions.

No Tribal Nation should remain landless. All Tribal Nations, whatever their historical circumstances, need and deserve a stable, sufficient land base—a homeland—to support robust Tribal self-government, cultural preservation, and economic development. The federal government must ensure that every Tribal Nation has the ability to restore its homelands, regardless of the concerns of other units of government, private citizens, or other interests. This is a necessary function of the U.S. government in delivering upon its trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations and regaining a land base is essential to the exercise of Tribal self-governance. Jurisdiction over territory is a bedrock principle of sovereignty, and Tribal Nations must exercise such jurisdiction in order to fully implement the inherent sovereignty we possess. While USET SPF member Tribal Nations ultimately seek full jurisdiction and management over our homelands without federal government interference and oversight, we recognize the critical importance of the restoration of our land bases through the land-into-trust process. We further recognize that the federal government has a trust responsibility and obligation to Tribal Nations in the restoration and management of trust lands. With this in mind, it is vital that the land-into-trust process be available to and applied equally to all federally recognized Tribal Nations. This parity is central to the federal government's legal and moral obligations to all of Indian Country.

As Congress (and other branches of the federal government) approaches the restoration of Tribal homelands, USET SPF continues to repeat that this basic correction is simply that. It returns us to the status quo prior to 2009—a rigorous process for the acquisition of trust land for ALL federally recognized Tribal Nations. This long overdue fix does not confer any additional benefits or supersede any existing law, nor is it about anything other than the rightful restoration of Tribal homelands. USET SPF continues to call upon Congress to enact a fix to the 2009 Supreme Court decision in Carcieri v. Salazar. For too long, this

decision has impeded our ability to rightfully restore our land bases and pursue Nation building and rebuilding efforts. Congress must enact legislation that: (1) reaffirms the status of current trust lands; and (2) confirms that the Secretary of the Interior has authority to take land into trust for all federally recognized Tribal Nations.

Preserve and Strengthen Native Participation in the SBA 8(a) Program

Recently, the Small Business Administration's (SBA) 8(a) Business Development program has come under increased scrutiny by the Administration. USET SPF reminds Congress that the participation of Native businesses in the 8(a) Business Development program is a statutory requirement that advances the federal government's fulfillment of trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations. Native participation in the 8(a) program is grounded in the unique political and legal status, and government-to-government diplomatic relationship, between Tribal Nations and the federal government. Therefore, this program cannot be misconstrued as being "race-based preferencing." This was affirmed by SBA Administrator Loeffler through a communication relayed by the SBA General Counsel in May 2025, which confirmed that Native 8(a) participation is not tied to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and, therefore, holds no racial presumption.

Native federal contracting is the second-largest economic driver for Native communities—after hospitality—and supports over 125,000 jobs in all 50 states and internationally. A majority of these profits flow back to benefit Native communities through Tribal Nation investments in healthcare, education, public safety, infrastructure, and economic and community development. Native-owned contracting companies employ all ranges of jobs in diverse industries, including IT experts, engineering, construction, accounting and compliance, and maintenance. These companies regularly employ Tribal citizens in our communities, while also promoting competitive highly skilled positions to hire the best in the industry, resulting in stronger economies for all.

We remind Congress that the 8(a) program is a transformative economic development vehicle for Indian Country. The 8(a) program encourages and supports Tribal communities to build sustainable businesses and economies, rather than rely on direct federal aid, and reduces long-term direct government spending by fostering economic independence. Native 8(a) contractors are required to comply with the same stringent compliance, reporting, and oversight standards as all other government contractors—and they have proven to make good on their 8(a) contracts, according to the Department of War and other agencies. An 8(a) certification does not guarantee contracts awarded. Rather, all awards, including Native federal contracts, must be fulfilled by qualified companies that compete for and perform the work awarded based off of merit.

Native 8(a) contractors consistently help federal agencies meet mission requirements faster, more effectively, and with greater operational agility. Streamlined procurement authorities, including sole-source tools, enable federal agencies to respond rapidly to immediate needs. There are clear benefits realized in Native 8(a) contracting as agencies federal agencies benefit from reduced procurement timelines, lower administrative burden, and increased continuity of operations. For these reasons, the Subcommittee and Congress must work with the Administration and SBA to preserve the ability of Native vendors to participate in the 8(a) program. Further, USET SPF urges the Subcommittee and Congress to support the codification of the "Rule of Two" (S. 2656) and "Bona Fide Place of Business" (S. 991) bills to eliminate key barriers to greater Native participation in the 8(a) program.

Protect the CDFI Fund from Future RIFs and Disburse Inappropriately Withheld Funds

On October 10, 2025, all personnel at the Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) Fund received termination notices based on an Office of Management and Budget (OMB) memorandum declaring that Fund programs "no longer align with current federal priorities." Congress temporarily reversed this action through the FY 2025 Continuing Resolution, H.R. 5371, but the Administration has previously made clear its intentions to abolish the CDFI Fund. The staff of the CDFI Fund carry out essential, critical, and impactful work, such as disbursing Native American CDFI Assistance (NACA) funding, administering New Markets Tax Credits (NMTCs) that drive Indian Country economic development, and certifying Native CDFIs—which unlocks significant additional capital for vital projects. To maintain national economic stability and ensure Native communities can access critical financing, the Subcommittee and Congress must direct the Administration to abandon any plans to abolish the CDFI Fund and protect its staff from further reduction in force (RIF) actions.

In addition, for the past 11 months, the Administration has withheld fiscal year (FY) 2025 funding authorized by Congress for the Community Development Financial Institution's (CDFI) NACA program. A recent survey conducted by the Native CDFI Network revealed that continued withholding of this funding will severely impact Native CDFIs by hampering their ability to meet critical service delivery for our citizens and communities. These include harmful impacts to meet existing loan demand for first-time homebuyers and entrepreneurs and delays in urgently needed new low-interest loan products. It will also reduce CDFIs' capacity to provide hands-on technical assistance, and make it harder to leverage long-term, low-interest private capital for small business, housing, and consumer lending—especially in rural areas. For these reasons, the Subcommittee and Congress should direct the OMB and the Department of the Treasury to release this FY 2025 funding without further delay.

Ensure Tribal Nation Tax Parity

The federal government has a responsibility to ensure that federal tax law treats Tribal Nations in a manner consistent with our sovereign governmental status, as reflected under the U.S. Constitution and numerous federal laws, treaties, and federal court decisions. With this in mind, we remain focused on the advancement of tax reform that would address inequities in the tax code and eliminate state dual taxation. Revenue generated within Indian Country continues to be taken outside our borders or otherwise falls victim to a lack of parity. Similarly, Tribal governments continue to lack many of the same benefits and flexibility offered to other units of government under the tax code. This largely prevents Tribal Nations from achieving an economic multiplier effect, allowing for each dollar to turn over multiple times within a given Tribal economy. The failure of the federal government to recognize Tribal Nations in a manner consistent with our sovereign governmental status has hindered our efforts to build, rebuild, and grow our economies.

USET SPF continues to press Congress for changes to the U.S. tax code that would provide governmental parity and economic development to Tribal Nations. These efforts have included support in previous Congresses for passage of the Tribal Tax and Investment Reform Act, which will soon be reintroduced in the House. This bill specifies the treatment of Tribal Nations as states with respect to bond issuance and modified the treatment of pension and employee benefit plans maintained by a Tribal government. It also aimed to modify the treatment of Tribal foundations and charities, provides an annual $175 million allocation for New Markets Tax Credits for Tribal communities, and expands development of affordable housing through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits.

While the Administration has recently made significant progress by issuing final regulations recognizing the tax status of wholly-owned Tribally chartered entities and the authority of Tribal Nations to implement the General Welfare Exclusion Act of 2014, several issues with the U.S. tax code remain and must be

addressed by Congress directly. USET SPF continues to urge the Subcommittee to support legislative efforts in the 119th Congress to increase Tribal Nation economic parity, such as passage of the Tribal Tax and Investment Reform Act.

Address Dual Taxation in Indian Country

Dual taxation hinders Tribal Nations from achieving our own revenue generating potential. Although Tribal Nations have authority to tax non-citizens doing business in Indian Country, when other jurisdictions can tax those same non-citizens for the same transactions, Tribal Nations must lower their taxes to keep overall pricing at rates the market can bear or forgo levying a tax at all. The application of an outside government's tax often makes the Tribal tax economically unfeasible. Dual taxation undercuts the ability of Tribal Nations to offer tax incentives to encourage non-Indian business entities onto our lands to create jobs and stimulate Tribal economies. As long as outside governments tax non-Indian businesses on our lands—even if a Tribal government offers complete Tribal tax immunity to attract a new non-Indian business—that business is subject to the same state tax rate that is applicable outside our jurisdictional boundaries. As a matter of economic fairness, we ask SIIA to work with us to support and advance initiatives in Congress that would bring certainty in tax jurisdiction to Tribal lands by confirming the exclusive, sovereign authority of Tribal governments to assess taxes on all economic activities occurring within our jurisdictional boundaries.

Strengthen EDA's support of Indian Country Economic Development

The U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA) supports Tribal Nations' economic development efforts through dedicated programs. These include the recent Indigenous Communities program and grant opportunities for planning, infrastructure, and business development. Passed in 2024, the Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act authorizes EDA to hold Tribal consultations to develop a strategic plan for Indian Country economic development. This plan will direct EDA to ensure its grants support Tribal Nations' efforts to build, improve, or better leverage economic assets for critical infrastructure, workforce development, innovation and entrepreneurship, economic recovery resilience, and manufacturing. This will empower job creation and economic growth in Tribal and surrounding communities. To further these efforts, Congress should direct the Administration to support the permanent Office of Native Affairs at EDA and ensure it has dedicated staff to assist Tribal Nations, EDA, and other Department of Commerce agencies to advance Indian Country economic development.

Invest in and Rebuild Tribal Infrastructure—A Marshall Plan for Tribal Nations

For generations, the federal government—despite abiding trust and treaty obligations—has substantially under-invested in Indian Country's infrastructure and engaged in hostile actions against Tribal Nations to destroy our Tribal economies and undermine our efforts to pursue Nation building and rebuilding. While the United States faces crumbling infrastructure nationally, there are many in Indian Country who lack even basic infrastructure access. Much like the U.S. investment in the rebuilding of European nations following World War II via the Marshall Plan, the legislative and executive branches should commit to the same level of responsibility to assisting in the rebuilding of Tribal Nations, as our current circumstances are, in large part, directly attributable to the historic shameful acts and policies of the U.S. In the same way the Marshall Plan acknowledged America's debt to European sovereigns and was utilized to strengthen our relationships and security abroad, the U.S. should make this strategic investment domestically. We strongly encourage and recommend that SIIA, and Congress as a whole, review USET SPF's 2022 publication, *Marshall Plan for Tribal Nations: A Restorative Justice and Domestic Investment Plan*, and enact legislation that upholds the federal government's trust and treaty obligations, advances Tribal self-determination, and supports our Nation building and rebuilding efforts. This document serves as a foundation to guide the federal government in responsible, appropriate, and long overdue investment in Indian Country.

Conclusion

The failure of the federal government to uphold its trust and treaty obligations has contributed to overly bureaucratic oversight and antiquated paternalism in the management of Tribal affairs. Among other issues, this has created economic insecurity in Indian Country, which is emblematic of the larger issues we face as Tribal Nations. Development and implementation of policies and programs that recognize and uphold our inherent sovereignty and self-determination and fulfill trust and treaty obligations are necessary to alleviate economic hardship, build and rebuild Tribal Nations, and improve the quality of life for our citizens and communities. Federal economic policies must be improved for the benefit of Tribal Nations, Tribal citizens, and Tribal communities. This will ensure that all federal economic development dollars available to and invested in Tribal Nations have the greatest degree of flexibility in uses and reduced administrative burdens to support our self-determined efforts to advance economic growth.

In light of the persistent economic challenges facing Tribal Nations, which are the result of the federal government's failure to fund essential Tribal programs and service, Congress must act to ensure we have the maximum flexibility to utilize these critical dollars to increase the economic and general well-being of our citizens and communities. Further, we emphasize that Congress must defer to Tribal Nations and recognize our inherent sovereignty to pursue our economic priorities as determined by our duly elected and appointed Tribal leaders who are best positioned to address the needs of our citizens and communities. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate further with the Subcommittee on economic policies that better honor federal trust and treaty obligations and uphold our inherent sovereignty to pursue our Nation building and rebuilding priorities to support economic opportunities and general welfare for our Tribal Nations, Tribal citizens, and Tribal communities.