

**Senate Committee on Indian Affairs**  
**Impacts of Government Shutdowns and Agency Reductions in Force on Native Communities**  
**October 29, 2025**

**Opening Statements:**

Chair: Sen. Murkowski (R-AK)

- The government shutdown and agency reductions in force disrupt trust and treaty obligations that the federal government has with Tribal nations.
- Immediate impacts include food insecurity where Native parents that rely on SNAP are struggling to feed their families; maintenance and repairs at health facilities are stalled; Tribal governments are forced to use their limited savings to maintain services.
- Reduction in Force (RIF) across federal agencies weaken programs that are vital to Native communities
- Urged agencies to uphold trust and treaty responsibilities to Tribal nations.

Ranking Member: Sen. Schatz (D-HI)

- The federal government's trust, treaty, and legal obligations to Tribal nations should not disappear during a shutdown where essential services like healthcare, housing, education, and public safety are jeopardized.
- Several Tribes have declared states of emergency because of funding shortfalls and service disruptions.
- RIFs are not mandated by the Anti-Deficiency Act or any automatic process; RIFs are a choice made by the administration.
- There is a concern that RIFs and staff losses will lead to damage that may continue after the shutdown.
- Clarity is needed between the impacts of the shutdown versus the RIFs and the SCIA needs to provide factual clarity, so Tribes can plan and respond as needed.

**Witnesses:**

- The Honorable Sarah E. Harris, Vice Chairwoman/Secretary – United South and Eastern Tribes, Nashville, TN.
- Mr. Ben Mallot, President – Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage, AK
- Mr. Kerry Bird, Board President – National Indian Education Association, Washington, DC
- Mr. Pete Upton, CEO – Native CDFI Network, Grand Island, NE
- Mr. A.C. Locklear, CEO – National Indian Health Board, Washington, DC

Witnesses who raised issues related to Tribal food and agriculture

- The Honorable Sarah E. Harris, Vice Chairwoman/Secretary – United South and Eastern Tribes, Nashville, TN.
  - Trust and treaty obligations are not limited to HIS, BIA, or BIE. These responsibilities are across all agencies that serve Native communities.

- RIFs were started without regard for Tribal facing/serving programs, services, and contracts.
  - Food Insecurity - SNAP and WIC are running out of funds, forcing Tribes to re-allocate resources already limited. For example, Penobscot Nation has had to reallocate \$200,000 to cover nutrition needs for November.
  - Some Tribes are considering taking out lines of credit to continue service provision
  - There is no clear information on funding timelines, staff availability, or program continuity.
  - Congress should protect all federal Indian funding through advance appropriations and move toward full and mandatory funding.
  - Exemptions should be made for Tribal serving programs and personnel from RIFs and shutdown impacts.
- Mr. Ben Mallot, President – Alaska Federation of Natives, Anchorage, AK
    - Many Tribal organizations did not anticipate a 30-day shutdown; so, there are great impacts in Alaska where winter conditions are severe, and prolonged government shutdown is life-threatening.
    - The price of food in Alaska is high so without SNAP and LIHEAP, families are forced to choose between food and heat.
    - SNAP funding is soon to end, leaving elders and families without essential foods.
    - Called for SCIA to be innovative and responsive in reopening the government and supporting Tribal communities.
- Mr. Pete Upton, CEO – Native CDFI Network, Grand Island, NE
    - Native CDFIs are lifelines in Tribal communities: 46% of tribal communities are in banking deserts. CDFIs fill the gap with access to capital and credit, financial education, and support for small businesses, homeownership, agriculture, and consumer lending.
    - FY25 NA CDFI remains frozen with no staff to release the awards, finalize agreements, or process certifications and recertifications.
    - The shutdown halts access to critical seed capital for Native CDFIs whose average asset size is about \$5.8 million.
    - CDFIs are not a partisan issue
- Mr. A.C. Locklear, CEO – National Indian Health Board, Washington, DC
    - Lack of SNAP funding results in health impacts because of food insecurity.
    - Tribes are declaring states of emergency and relying on traditional practices like hunting elk to feed their members.

## Q&A

- Sen. Cortez Masto, (D-NV)
  - As of Nov. 1, SNAP funding will run out and this impacts her Tribe in Duck Valley, affecting 200 families (50-60% of the Tribe) who rely on SNAP
  - Sen. Masto asked Mr. Locklear about the emergency measures Tribes were taking to address the loss of SNAP. He responded by stating that Tribes were accessing

their reserve funds and declaring states of emergency. They work with SNAP partners and help with any health-related issues.

- Tribes are scrambling to switch between SNAP and FDPIR to find sources of nutrition for those in need.
  - Nutrition assistance, housing, and other basic services are part of the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal nations.
- Sen. Tina Smith, (D-MN)
    - Expressed deep concern about the loss of CDFI Fund staff as Native CDFIs are vital in providing home mortgages on Tribal lands.
    - Stated that SNAP and WIC are not optional, but legal obligations.
    - Urged Congress to protect Tribal service offices.

Note: Apart from Senator Murkowski as Chair of SCIA, there were no other Republican Senators present.