

## House Natural Resource Committee

### Legislative Hearing on H.R. 8954- Tribal Regulatory Reform Implementation Act of 2026

June 9, 2026

#### Highlights:

H.R. 8954 seeks to revive a long-dormant federal mandate to remove regulatory barriers to Tribal economic development by shifting responsibility from Commerce to the Department of the Interior, which proponents argue is better equipped to work directly with Tribes. Witnesses strongly supported the bill as a long-overdue correction but stressed that without dedicated funding, staffing, and interagency coordination, the effort could again fail to deliver meaningful reform.

#### Key Points:

- The original 2000 law aimed to identify and eliminate federal regulatory barriers to Tribal economic development, including investment and business formation hurdles
- Witnesses emphasized that the regulatory reform authority created in 2000 was never convened, leaving its mandate unfulfilled for over two decades.
  - The key reasons cited were a lack of funding and staffing, and low prioritization within the Department of Commerce.
  - This has resulted in continued fragmented and burdensome federal regulations limiting Tribal economic growth.
- The rationale given for transferring to Interior was that DOI is the primary federal agency for Tribal relations and trust responsibilities. It already manages key programs (e.g., BIA, Indian economic development offices). It also has existing relationships and institutional knowledge of Tribal governments.
  - Proponents argued this shift would improve coordination, reduce interagency fragmentation, and it better aligns regulatory reform efforts with Tribal economic priorities.
- Witness Rodney Butler (NAFOA) called the bill a “long-overdue fulfillment” of a 25-year-old congressional commitment. He emphasized that regulatory barriers remain widespread across federal agencies, not just Commerce.
  - He stressed the need for strong Tribal representation in the authority (originally 12 of 21 seats), interagency coordination (Treasury, Commerce, etc. must still be engaged).

- Tribal economic development barriers cited included complicated federal approval processes, tax and financing inequities, and infrastructure constraints tied to regulatory delays.
- Member Perspectives
  - There was bipartisan support for improving Tribal economic opportunities and sovereignty.
  - Representative Teresa Leger Fernandez supported the transfer but raised concerns about whether DOI will have sufficient staffing and resources to implement the authority effectively.
  - Members repeatedly highlighted that without funding the authority risks remaining inactive again. They also emphasized that Congressional follow-through (appropriations + oversight) will be critical.
- Policy Implications
  - If implemented effectively, H.R. 8954 could establish a central mechanism to identify and remove federal regulatory barriers, improve access to capital, business development, and investment in Indian Country, strengthen Tribal self-determination through economic sovereignty.
  - However, success depends on adequate funding and staffing, active Tribal participation, and sustained interagency coordination.