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Statement of Councilwoman Marie Summers
Roundtable on Economic Disparity in Indian Country
April 7, 2022 @ 10 a.m. (EST) - HVC-210 in the Capitol Building

Introduction

Chairman Himes, Ranking Member Steil, Congresswoman Moore, and other distinguished Members of the Committee:

Shekoli Swakwek WaU·Tehyalu ni yuu·kyats On·yote'a·ká·Na·ee “Wa·Ken·Yat·TAY” nee·wa·ket'lota'

(Hello everyone, my name Marie Summers, I am of the people of the UpRight stone, and I am from the turtle clan family).

Currently, I serve as an elected Councilwoman for the Oneida Nation located in Wisconsin.

Yaw^ko (thank you) for hosting this roundtable today.

For too long, Indian Country has been forgotten and overlooked, and I appreciate that there is movement toward making change. The sad reality is that even 20 years of federal policy that respects Tribal sovereignty and self-determination has not been able to undo the damage of the last two centuries. But I understand the need to continue our good work, and this discussion is another step on the road to progress.

Oneida Nation Demographics

- ❖ The Oneida Nation is located next to the City of Green Bay with a portion of the city located within the Nation's reservation boundaries.
- ❖ The Nation's reservation totals 65,400 acres, with the Nation owning approximately 42.5% of the lands.
- ❖ The Nation has approximately 17,300 enrolled tribal citizens living across the world.
 - About 8,000 of our tribal members live on or nearby the reservation, with our second highest tribal member population living in the Milwaukee/Chicago area.
- ❖ The Nation's reservation is intersected by two counties, 8 school districts and 8 municipal governments.¹

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Economic Impact Study

- ❖ In 2017, St. Norbert's College Center for Business & Economic Analysis performed a study on the Nation's regional economic impact and determined that our regional economic effect was \$744 million.
- ❖ Of the \$744 million, our economic enterprises, such as gaming, hotel, construction, financial services, recreation and agriculture, attributed to the creation of 3,304 jobs and approximately \$510 million in total economic output.

Economic Development

Although the economic impact study is a good indicator that the Nation's economy is stable, we also know we are in a good position to take advantage of more opportunities. Our reservation is a prime location, with access to major throughways (I-29 and I-41), waterways (Bay of Green Bay), an international airport (Austin Straubel Airport) and, yet we continue to face barriers.

As the Nation continues to zone and develop our lands, questions around the existence of the Nation's reservation, boundaries and jurisdiction have led to a litigatory relationship with one of our 8 municipal governments. Although the Nation continues to prevail in litigation and has favorably entered into cooperative government agreements with our local counties and municipal governments, the litigatory nature of one municipal continues to delay projects and deters working partnerships in advancing community and economic development.

Self Governance

The Oneida Nation recognizes that a part of the economic renaissance at Oneida began with the passage of the Indian Self Determination and Educational Assistance Act (ISDEAAA). This law ushered in the era of Self-Governance.

For those of you who work with Indian Country less frequently, let me take a moment to explain. Self-governance is rooted in the principle that Tribes know how to administer federal programs and services to their communities more effectively than anonymous federal employees in Washington, D.C., who may not understand our community, our needs, or our people. Self - Governance allows tribal nations to exercise their inherent right to self-govern by negotiating agreements with federal agencies that authorize tribal governments to deliver federal resources and services to their citizens. Through Self Governance, Tribal Nations are delivering programs and services in an efficient and effective manner that meets the unique needs of our tribal communities. Self-Governance affords Tribal Nations the ability to develop long-term plans, provides flexibility to redesign federal programs to improve outcomes, reduces federal

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bureaucracy, and expands local decision-making and tribal control all while increasing accountability to the communities we serve. This has led to better services which has improved the health, welfare, and quality of life in tribal communities.

It has given our Tribal government command over our resources and allows us to build greater internal capacity at the local level. Our government is now far more robust, sophisticated, and nimble than it has ever been, and self-governance is a significant contributor to that.

Implementing self-governance has taught the Oneida Nation a few lessons that may be of interest as the Committee considers ways to help grow and sustain economic opportunity on Tribal lands.

1. Funding administered by the Tribal government is more effective than funding passed down through the state government and grants the Nation receives.
2. Consistent funding over time builds capacity; one-time funding, even if significant, does little to change the long-term prospects of life on Indian reservations.
3. Congress must restore full Tribal sovereignty over Tribal lands to address the many challenges that pose issues when you have multiple overlapping jurisdictions trying to push forward community and economic development.
4. Despite recent successes, federal law remains biased against Indian Country even today.

I know the roundtable will go into further details on this subject, so please let me conclude my opening statement by just saying again how much I appreciate the opportunity to be here today. The United States leadership is recognizing the importance of working with the indigenous people of this country, and I am grateful that this awakening will provide my constituents with greater opportunity in the years to come.