

**House Committee on Natural Resources - Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee**  
[Examining 50 years of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in Indian Country](#)

**4 April 2025**

**Overview:** This field hearing was an opportunity for Congressional and Tribal representatives to examine 50 years of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA) in Indian Country. The hearing was held in Oklahoma City, OK.

**Witnesses:**

- The Hon. Bill Anoatubby, Governor, Chickasaw Nation
- The Hon. Chuck Hoskin Jr., Principal Chief, Cherokee Nation
- The Hon. Gary Batton, Chief, Choctaw Nation
- The Hon. Wena Supernaw, Chair, Quapaw Nation
- The Hon. Martin Harvier, President, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
- The Hon. David Hill, Principal Chief, Muscogee Creek Nation
- Mr. Mark Rogers, Chief Executive Officer, Osage Nation Health System
- Mr. Jay Spaan, Executive Director, Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium

**Highlights:**

- [House Committee on Natural Resources Hearing Memo of Field Hearing in Oklahoma City](#)

**Opening statements:**

[Congressman Bruce Westerman \(Chair; R-AR\)](#)

- Roundtable in DC in November 2024 findings:
  - There is interest in dialogue about Tribal Self-Governance.
  - Tribes know best how to help their people
- Tribes continue to have challenges to expand 638 to other agencies.
- Hope for more opportunities for Congress and Tribes to improve the 638 authorities and the relationships between Tribal governments and Federal Government

[Congresswoman Teresa Leger Fernandez \(D-NV\)](#)

- Important to celebrate and reflect at this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ISDEA
- Hope to increase 638 to agencies such as USDA and to cut bureaucracy and decrease burdens for Tribes.
- Also raised concerns that underfunding of IHS and \$880 billion cuts in Medicaid would hurt Tribal communities. All Tribal leaders agreed that cuts to Medicaid would be devastating for Tribes.

Tribal leaders identified the importance of self-governance and self-determination authorities as well as the progress achieved in the 50 years of ISDEAA. Some of these key messages and successes include:

- Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby gave testimony saying ISDEAA is monumental for Tribes to administer programs that they had not before. 638 in food distribution allowed procurement and expansion, which would greatly benefit the Nation.
- Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Hoskin testified how ISDEAA demonstrates bipartisanship between Congress and the President that focuses on self-determination and unshackling Tribes. It enabled Tribes to become economic engines in terms of building roads and infrastructure, supporting housing and education, operating world-class healthcare facilities, and preserving natural resources without being bogged down in red tape. Capacity building is key, and every Tribe has the potential to execute on 638 contracts and compacts, but because of the history of bad federal Indian policy, the capacity for Tribes is not always there. Healthcare makes the most meaningful impact on people's lives, so any way that a Tribe can assume responsibility for healthcare would be important.
- Choctaw Nation Chief Gary Batton noted ISDEAA's highly successful impact for Tribes and expressed his thanks for the recognition that self-determination is foundational. Choctaw Nation's compacted healthcare has now resulted in more than one million outpatient visits. Standing up a meat processing facility in Smithville Oklahoma has helped Tribal and non-Tribal citizens because there are no other places to process meats in that area, showing the effectiveness of 638 as an economic development driver.
- Quapaw Nation Chairwoman Wena Supenaw described her view that self-governance alone is a form of economic development that has led Tribes to move from dependence to partners of the U.S. government. Work on compacted realty services took decades, from 1964 to about one year ago. It was complex and required negotiations with external entities, yet it all was done without going through the courts.
- Tribal Self Governance Executive Director Jay Spaan explained that when Tribal Nations control programs, outcomes improve. Moving forward, there needs to be a modernization at the DOI—including its outdated database for transfer of funds not designed for self-governance and compacting - to ensure it can support self-governance in the future.