

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Stacey Plaskett

#### Hearing on “Examining Federal Programs that Serve Tribes and Their Members” Subcommittee on the Interior, Energy and Environment

February 15, 2017

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this critically important hearing. Tribal concerns are often underrepresented and I am glad that we have dedicated a hearing to addressing these issues and finding solutions.

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) High Risk Report has outlined several problems that the tribal community has faced in the areas of energy, healthcare and education. The report highlights problems ranging from inadequate federal oversight, limited federal workforce planning, outdated and deteriorating equipment, technology and infrastructure and incomplete or inaccurate data. These shortcomings are creating significant difficulties for these tribal communities.

Many tribal communities are heavily reliant on energy resources for their economic well-being and depend upon the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) to conduct thorough but efficient reviews. But GAO found that it took up to eight years for BIA to process permits; a delay which caused the tribe to lose an estimated \$95 million in revenues that it otherwise would have earned from tribal permitting fees, oil and gas severance taxes, and royalties. This represents an unacceptable financial burden on this community.

GAO also found that similar delays plagued the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Education, preventing tribal members from receiving timely health care and making schools unsafe for children.

In order to improve these federal agencies, the Department of the Interior Office of the Inspector General must be able adequately investigate these issues. However, I am very concerned that President Trump’s hiring ban is going to severely compromise the ability of the IG -- and IGs throughout the entire government -- to protect taxpayers from the type of mismanagement that GAO found.

I ask that my Republican colleagues join me in requesting that the President immediately lift the hiring ban, so our IGs can have the resources and staffing they need to ensure the proper functioning of government and prevent waste, fraud and abuse.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

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