



H.R. 7102: The Native American Entrepreneurial Opportunity Act Passes House Committee



President Nygren meets with SBA Assistant Administrator Jackson Brossy. Photo Source: OPVP

WASHINGTON, D.C.— The House Committee on Small Business unanimously approved H.R. 7102 on Wednesday. Sponsored by Representatives Sharice Davids (D-KS) and Eli Crane (R-AZ), this bipartisan legislation aims to establish an Office of Native American Affairs within the Small Business Administration (SBA), along with an Assistant Administrator who would directly report to the SBA Administrator.

Currently, the SBA's Office of Native American Affairs has a limited scope, focusing on outreach to tribal communities and linking Native American entrepreneurs with SBA resources. However, lacking statutory definition, this office is susceptible to unilateral dissolution. H.R. 7102 seeks to fortify the Office's capabilities by allocating a larger budget and staff, thereby ensuring Native American entrepreneurs have full access to SBA resources. With enhanced authority, the expanded Office of Native American Affairs could establish field offices outside of Washington, DC, facilitating direct engagement with Native American business owners.

Entrepreneurs within the Navajo Nation confront distinctive challenges and opportunities stemming from the reservation's cultural, economic, and geographic dynamics. These challenges include restricted access to capital due to jurisdictional complexities and perceived risks, deterring traditional lending institutions from investment. Furthermore, infrastructure deficiencies such as unreliable electricity and internet connectivity impede business operations and market expansion beyond the reservation. Navigating a multifaceted regulatory landscape at tribal, state, and federal levels presents another obstacle, often accompanied by high

compliance costs. Additionally, cultural alignment with Navajo values and community norms is essential for entrepreneurial success.

Despite obstacles, Navajo small business owners draw strength from their rich cultural heritage, resilience, and deep connection to the land. Collaborative initiatives among tribal governments, nonprofits, and the private sector have fostered a burgeoning entrepreneurial ecosystem in Tribal communities by enhancing infrastructure, improving access to capital, and offering business support services. These endeavors empower Navajo entrepreneurs, foster economic prosperity, and safeguard the cultural legacy of the Navajo Nation for future generations. The establishment of the Office of Native American Affairs is poised to catalyze increased efforts and legitimize our current concerns in regard to entrepreneurship to foster comprehensive solutions across Indian Country, especially within the Navajo Nation.

Following its approval by the House Committee on Small Business, H.R. 7102 will advance to a floor vote and, if successful, proceed to the U.S. Senate. Notably, in July 2023, the Senate Small Business Committee passed a similar bill, S.1156 - the Native American Entrepreneurial and Opportunity Act of 2023, championed by Senators John Hickenlooper (D-CO) and Cynthia Lummis (R-WY). As these bills progress through the legislative process, the Navajo Nation Washington Office will provide updates.