



Fifty Years of Self-Determination: Oversight Hearing on ISDEAA Implementation and Next Steps



United States Senate Chamber inside the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

Photo credit: United States Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On September 17, 2025, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs convened a hearing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA). The oversight hearing, titled “Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act Successes and Opportunities at the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service,” focused on the progress and future of self-determination in Indian Country.

Witnesses included Tribal leadership, Department of the Interior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Economic Development Kennis Bellmard, Indian Health Service Acting Director Benjamin Smith, and Self-Governance Communication and Education Tribal Consortium Executive Director Jay Spaan. The hearing highlighted the historic success of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), noting how it empowered Tribes to take control of federal programs. Witnesses and Senators discussed how this shift improved the efficiency of services and strengthened economic outcomes across Indian Country.

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chair, and Senator Brian Schatz, Vice Chair, also addressed current challenges facing self-determination. They pointed to federal workforce reductions that have

strained relationships between Tribes and federal agencies, created bureaucratic delays, and added new administrative burdens.

Both Senators stressed the importance of upholding tribal consultation and sovereignty. They pressed Deputy Assistant Secretary Kennis Bellmard and Acting Director Benjamin Smith to ensure these principles remain central in their agencies' work with Tribes.