



NEWS RELEASE

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REP. HEINRICH INTRODUCES BILL TO ENCOURAGE TRIBAL CONTROL OVER SURFACE LAND LEASING

Washington, DC – Today Rep. Martin Heinrich (D-NM) introduced the “Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership Act” (“HEARTH”) to reform Federal leasing requirements and encourage housing and community development in Native American communities.

The Indian Long Term Leasing Act of 1955 (“ILTLA”) as currently written requires the Secretary of the Interior to review and approve leases for residential, commercial and other purposes for parcels of land on Indian reservations. This approval process can become lengthy, taking many months or longer, which often hinders the development of housing and related infrastructure development.

“This process can take between six months and two years, resulting in an intolerable delay for finalizing a home sale,” Rep. Heinrich noted on the House floor. “This bill would eliminate this requirement and allow tribal governments to approve trust land leases directly, giving more Native American families the chance to own their own home.”

Rep. Heinrich’s bill will amend the ILTLA to authorize Indian tribes to issue regulations that govern the leasing process on their own lands without the review or approval of the Secretary. As a pre-condition to the tribe negotiating and executing leases under its own regulatory authority, Heinrich’s bill requires the Secretary to approve the tribal regulation.

“With this legislation, Rep. Heinrich has shown his commitment to reforming Federal laws in a manner that respects tribal authority and decision-making. This is good legislation that improves the delivery of housing assistance and related economic development to meet the needs of Indian Country,” said Marty Shuravloff, Chairman of the National American Indian Housing Council. “We heard from our members that they need these reforms and we are committed to seeing this bill signed into law this year.”

The bill also requires that the Bureau of Indian Affairs submit to Congress a report on the history and experience of Indian tribes that have assumed responsibility for land titling functions under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. This report will be used to determine how and under what circumstances participating tribes have improved the land titling functions and ways to encourage other Indian tribes to assume the same functions.

Rep. Heinrich, elected in 2008, represents the First District of New Mexico. There are 3 Federally-recognized tribes and 19 Pueblos in New Mexico.

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NAIHC is the only national organization that promotes, supports, and encourages Indian tribes and tribally-designated housing entities (TDHEs) in their efforts to provide culturally-relevant, decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. NAIHC has a membership of 267 tribes and TDHEs, representing nearly 460 Indian tribes, and provides its members with training, technical assistance, research, communications and advocacy.