



**To:** NCAI and NIGA Member Tribes

**From:** President Brian Cladoosby  
Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr.

**Re:** Champion of Indian Country Attacked for Defending Tribal Sovereignty

**Date:** June 19, 2015

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Dear Tribal Leader:

Today the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) and National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) jointly reach out to all leaders in Indian Country to ask for your unyielding support and defense of Representative Betty McCollum. Since elected in 2000, Representative McCollum asserted herself as one of Indian Country's strongest advocates and a true defender of our sovereignty.

Unfortunately, Representative McCollum is being unfairly attacked for defending the sovereign status of Tribal Governments across this Country. On Tuesday, June 16, 2015, the House Education and Workforce Committee's Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor, and Pensions held a hearing on H.R. 511, the Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act of 2015, sponsored by Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN). The hearing was held to take testimony on the NLRB's 2004 *San Manuel* ruling that treats Indian tribes as second-class sovereigns under the National Labor Relations Act. H.R. 511 would ensure that tribal governments are treated the same as the federal, state, and 80,000 local governments under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

The Subcommittee received testimony from a witness who is a member of the labor union UNITE HERE and is also a member of a federally recognized Indian tribe. This gentleman's testimony made it clear that UNITE HERE strongly opposes H.R. 511 and parity for tribal governments under the NLRA. As the two largest Indian advocacy organizations in America, NCAI and NIGA have a solemn duty to protect the interests of our Tribal Nations. While we may have policy disagreements with other organizations, NCAI and NIGA have always strived

to maintain a civil and open debate. However, in their testimony, UNITE HERE resorted to disparaging name calling by equating Indian Tribal Governments with "the most repressive dictatorships." UNITE HERE's testimony crossed the line.

In response to the "dictatorship" characterization of our Tribal Governments, Representative McCollum, who also serves as a co-chair of the House Native American Caucus, issued a statement defending Indian tribal governments and tribal sovereignty. Representative McCollum simply stated that the "dictatorship" comment during the testimony "is an insult to Indian Country that has no place in a serious policy debate." [Her full statement is attached.](#)

Unfortunately, UNITE HERE is now trying to mischaracterize Representative McCollum's support for Tribal Governments. In a press release issued on June 17<sup>th</sup>, UNITE HERE called Representative McCollum's defense of Indian Country a "disgrace" and threatened political retribution against her.

Representative McCollum, and many other Members of Congress both Republican and Democratic, have taken seriously their vow to uphold the U.S. Constitution - and with it the federal government's Treaty and Constitutional obligations to Indian Country. The NLRA regulates labor relations between employees and private employers. The NLRA does not apply to the Federal Government, States, territorial Governments, or even wholly owned governmental corporations. Tribal Governments are merely seeking the same respect under the law. As presented at the hearing, Tribal Governments in most cases have worker protections and labor codes that meet or exceed the NLRA's requirements.

Representative McCollum has never wavered in her support of the hard working union members in her district, just as she has never wavered in her support of tribal sovereignty. NCAI and NIGA have come together to ask the Tribal Nations of our respective organizations to never waver in their support of Representative McCollum and the many other members who are supporting fairness for tribal governments.

Sincerely,



President Brian Cladoosby  
National Congress of American Indians



Chairman Ernie Stevens, Jr.  
National Indian Gaming Association

[Click here to view Rep. McCollum's statement on H.R. 511 Hearing](#)

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