



News from the
Committee on Natural Resources
Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II - Chairman

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Statement of U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II
Chairman, Committee on Natural Resources
Legislative Hearing on
H.R. 31, Lumbee Recognition Act and
H.R. 1385, Thomasina E. Jordan Indian Tribes of Virginia Federal Recognition Act
April 18, 2009

This morning the Committee is meeting to conduct a hearing on H.R. 31, the Lumbee Recognition Act, and H.R. 1385, a bill which would grant federal recognition to six Indian Tribes residing in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We have with us several Native Americans and other individuals from North Carolina and Virginia who have come here this morning to give, and listen to, testimony of great importance. We are also honored by the presence of the Governor of Virginia, Tim Kaine.

Both of these bills were considered by the Committee last Congress, and passed by the House of Representatives.

With respect to the Lumbee bill, quite frankly, and it pains me to say this, I feel like we are all starring in the movie Groundhog Day. The legislation passed the House in the 102nd Congress. It passed the House in the 103rd Congress. And it passed the House in the 110th Congress. Always by large margins.

Yet here we are again, at the beginning of the 111th Congress, starting the process all over once again.

Time and time again, the hopes and dreams of the Lumbee people have been raised, only to be dashed as each Congress fails to get the job done. Yet throughout these long decades you have continued to hold your heads high, with the dignity and respect you deserve.

I do not need to go through the long history of this struggle. It is well documented, and will be further documented during the course of this hearing.

As has the saga of the six Virginia tribes which are the subject of H.R. 1385. Two years ago marked the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Virginia. At the time, many Americans were startled to learn that the very Native Americans who greeted the English settlers are still not federally recognized as Tribes.

The members of these six Virginia tribes have faced decades of deliberate discrimination from policies aimed at stripping them of their identities. They were targeted, and subjected to having their race designation changed on their birth certificates and all other legal documents.

But they have endured, kept their traditions alive, and continue to function as governments.

In closing, I can assure you that the Committee will continue to press forward on tribal Congressional recognition when the circumstances indicate it is necessary to do so. And we will also continue to work to reform the Federal Acknowledgment Process that has long been considered broken by all involved in the process, including Congress.

Both the Lumbee and Virginia tribes require the attention of Congress. Let us now seriously go about the business of rectifying wrongs, to the Lumbee and to the Virginia Tribes.

Thank you.