



IBEW POLICY BRIEF

Chapter 7: Supporting Tribal Workers

The IBEW opposes the Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act, a thinly veiled attempt to roll back workers' rights on tribal land. The Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act seeks to strip workers of their fundamental rights at work. It has little to do with the freedom of Native Americans to self-govern.

Several consecutive congresses have introduced bills proposing "labor sovereignty" on tribal lands. The proposed legislation excludes Native American tribes and tribal enterprises, as well as institutions on tribal land from requirements for employers under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). The NLRA guarantees workers the right to organize, form a union and engage in collective bargaining. The NLRA also protects workers against unfair labor practices such as coercion, interference in union organizing campaigns and retaliation or discrimination based on union activity.

The bill would apply to all employees of those businesses, including non-tribal citizens. As a result, between 600,000 and 800,000 workers – including thousands of IBEW members working on tribal land – could lose protections guaranteed by the NLRA. This loss would constitute the most significant rollback of labor protections since Congress enacted the NLRA in 1935.

The number and type of businesses and construction on tribal land extends well beyond the gaming industry and includes mining operations, power plants, sawmills, construction companies, ski resorts, high-tech firms, hotels and spas. Many of these are commercial businesses, not governmental entities, and serve non-Native American populations.

The IBEW is committed to labor standards policies that help workers obtain better wages and benefits and ensure safe working conditions. Removing these worker protections, including the rights to organize and form a union, would harm Native American and non-Native American workers in historically challenged lands and communities.



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The Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act is a transparent attempt by gaming interests and contractors to cut their investments in those lands dramatically, underpay their workers, and make it harder for those workers to organize, bargain collectively, and exercise their rights under the NLRA. As such, the IBEW strongly opposes this legislation.

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