

## [Sherry L. Rupert Takes Tribal Tourism to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for First Time](#)



*Sherry L. Rupert, center, stands with fellow AIANTA members in Washington, D.C.*

**Washington, D.C. (June 26, 2014)** – Yesterday, Sherry L. Rupert, American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) Board President testified before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Oversight Hearing on "Economic Development: Encouraging Investment in Indian Country," bringing tribal tourism as means to economic development to the committee for the first time.

The hearing was held Wednesday, June 25, 2014 in Washington, D.C. and included a witness list of two panels. On the first panel, Dennis Nolan, Deputy Director of the Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund with the U.S. Department of the Treasury, spoke to the committee regarding his efforts to promote sustainable economic growth in Indian Country.

The hearing's second panel included Gary Davis, President and CEO of the National Center for American Indian Enterprise Development from Mesa, Arizona; William

"Mike" Lettig, Executive Vice President of the National Executive Native American Financial Services and Agribusiness, Key Bank, from Bellevue, Washington; Gerald Sherman, Vice-Chair of the Native CDFI Network, from Roscoe, Montana; Kevin Allis, Executive Director of the Native American Contractors Association, from Washington, D.C.; and Sherry L. Rupert, AIANTA Board President, from Carson City, Nevada.

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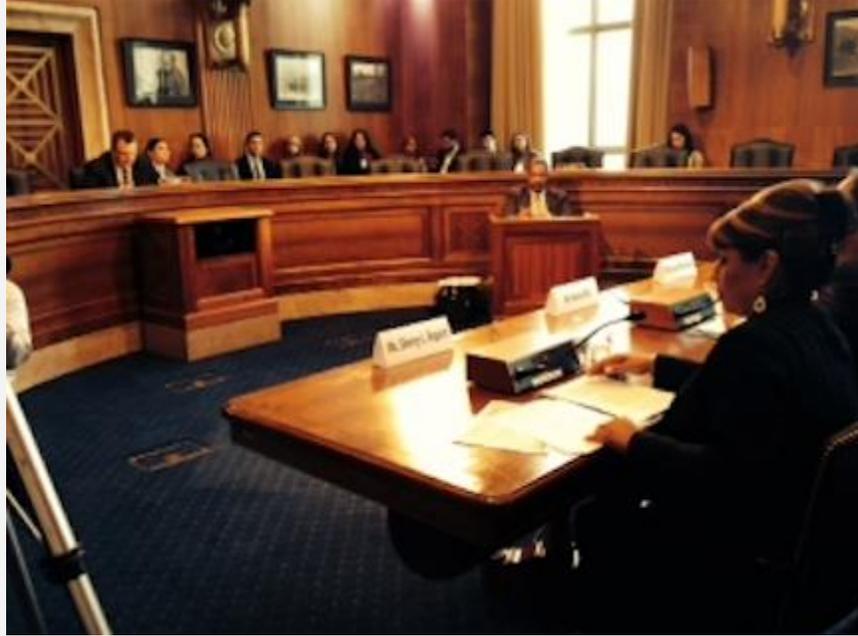
"Tourism is one of the most powerful economic drivers to Indian Country, and it is vital to Native communities that we get the awareness and the support that travel and tourism needs within Congress," said Rupert. "AIANTA is honored to have been invited to testify and thrilled to be making these strides in encouraging Indian Country tourism."

Witness testimonies covered topics ranging from private sector investment in Indian Country to bridging disparities such as poverty in Native communities through increased and continued investment in the development of those places.

As tourism in the United States and in Indian Country is one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of economic development and job creation, Rupert's testimony focused on the current and potential economic impact in both the United States and in Indian Country.

AIANTA also submitted a written testimony to the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, focusing on the potential of Indian Country tourism and all that the association is doing to embrace and enhance those opportunities for tribes across the country.

Congress' interest in tribal tourism is essential in Indian Country economic development. With greater coordination and collaboration between Indian tourism programs and federal agencies with tourism programs, such as that outlined in legislation currently being written under the title "NATIVE Act" or the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act, tourism development in Indian Country could be significantly boosted without expending any additional funds. The NATIVE Act, if passed, would organize federal resources that currently exist for tourism to be used collaboratively and made available to tribal governments, communities and businesses, ultimately resulting in more income and more investment in Indian Country tourism.



*Sheryl Rupert testifies before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs and Oversight in June 25, 2014 (Courtesy AIANTA)*

"How do we build on tourism from its current base in Indian Country - help create the capacity to provide all the needed services, involve our communities in these decisions, inspire investment, build the infrastructure needed and keep our cultures alive and thriving?" Rupert said. "At AIANTA, we strive to answer those questions every day."

Rupert is also the Executive Director of the State of Nevada Indian Commission, Chairwoman of Nevada's Indian Territory (a marketing arm of the Nevada Commission on Tourism), and sits on the U.S. Department of Commerce Travel and Tourism Advisory Board (US TTAB).

The entire written testimony is available upon request, and the panel of verbal witness testimonies are available for viewing at [www.indian.senate.gov](http://www.indian.senate.gov).