



## Tribal Labor Sovereignty

*"The NLRA provides workers the right to form or join unions and collectively bargain for better wages, hours or working conditions. The IBEW does not support taking these rights away."*

*—International President  
Lonnie Stephenson*



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# IBEW POLICY BRIEF

## GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

### Tribal Labor Sovereignty

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 and has little to do with the right of Native Americans to self-govern.

Bills proposing “labor sovereignty” on tribal lands have been introduced in several consecutive Congresses. The proposed legislation excludes Indian tribes and tribal enterprises and institutions on tribal land from requirements for employers under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which 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. Between 600,000 and 800,000 workers – including thousands of IBEW members working on tribal land – could lose protections guaranteed by the NLRA, which would constitute the biggest rollback of labor protections since the NLRA was enacted 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 be harmful to Native American and non-Native American workers in historically challenged lands and communities.

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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