



November 22, 2019

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Senate Indian Affairs Committee
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member, Senate Indian Affairs
Committee
838 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Udall,

The Coalition for American Heritage strongly supports S. 2165, the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act of 2019. Passage of this important legislation would help to prevent the overseas sales of illicitly-procured tribal objects and encourage the voluntary return of such items to their rightful owners.

The Coalition for American Heritage is an advocacy coalition that protects and advances our nation's commitment to heritage preservation. Supported by the American Cultural Resources Association, the Society for Historical Archaeology, the American Anthropological Association, and the Society for American Archaeology, the Coalition collectively represents more than 350,000 cultural resource management professionals, academic archaeologists and anthropologists, and other subject-matter experts with an interest in historic preservation. We have been deeply disturbed by seeing the archaeological heritage of our nation looted and sold abroad.

Without a law specifically prohibiting the export of looted tribal objects, many American Indian sacred items are shipped abroad and sold in auctions. Once these items are auctioned off, it is difficult to repatriate them and they are permanently lost to their communities of origin. In France, for example, the French government has been unwilling to halt the auctions of looted tribal objects because our nation has no explicit export restrictions and no federal export certificates.

Passage of the STOP Act would prohibit the export of objects of cultural patrimony obtained in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA), or the Antiquities Act. The STOP Act does not extend federal protections to any articles not already protected by these laws, but it does increase the penalties for violating them and prohibit export of the protected items. The STOP Act would also establish a certification system to allow for transactions of legally-acquired materials. Together, these measures would enable plaintiff tribes to access other countries' law enforcement mechanisms to regain their stolen property.

To help facilitate the return of sacred tribal objects, the STOP Act establishes a federal framework to support the voluntary return of previously-acquired items. The Department of the Interior will run a referral program to assist people in identifying a tribe that has a cultural affiliation with the objects to be returned.

We applaud the lawmakers, tribal leaders, federal officials, archaeologists, art dealers, and others who worked together to formulate this crucial legislation. The Coalition strongly supports the STOP Act and believes that passage of this bill will help halt the illegal trafficking of tribal cultural patrimony. We urge the committee to pass S. 2165 as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

American Anthropological Association
American Cultural Resources Association
Coalition for American Heritage
Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology

Society for American Archaeology
Society for California Archaeology
Society for Historical Archaeology