**CENTRAL CALIFORNIA YOKUTS NAGPRA COALITION**

October 28, 2026


Robert G. Jeff
NAGPRA Coalition Chairman
Tribal Vice Chairman
Santa Rosa Rancheria
PO Box 8
Lemoore, California 93245

Deann Kalamani
Tribal Council Chairperson
Picayune Rancheria
P.O. Box 2226
Oakhurst, California 93644

Michelle Heredia-Cordova
Tribal Chairperson
Table Mountain Rancheria
PO Box 410
Friant, California 93626

Leo Sisco
Tribal Chairman
Santa Rosa Rancheria
PO Box 8
Lemoore, California 93245

Neil Peyron
Chairman
Tule River Reservation
PO Box 589
Porterville, California 93258

Octavio Escobedo III
Tribal Chairperson
Tejon Indian Tribe
4941 David Road
Bakersfield, California 93307

Hillary Hammond Battles
NAGPRA Coalition
Vice Chairperson
Tribal Council
Picayune Rancheria
P.O. Box 2226
Oakhurst, California 93644


The Honorable John Thune
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Minority Leader, U.S. Senate
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Shelley Moore Capito
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sheldon Whitehouse
Ranking Member, US Senate Committee
On Environment and Public Works
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Martin Heinrich
Ranking Member, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Lee
Chair, U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: S. 5653, Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act**

Dear Honorable Congressional Leaders,

The five federally recognized Yokuts Tribes of California: Picayune Rancheria of the Chukchansi Indians, Table Mountain Rancheria, Santa Rosa Indian Community of the Santa Rosa Rancheria, California, Tule River Indian Tribe of the Tule River Reservation and the Tejon Indian Tribe (Tribes) write to respectfully request formal, government to government consultation on certain provisions of S. 5653, the Bipartisan American Affordability and Jobs Act (BAAJA), prior to any U.S. Senate vote on this legislation. The Tribes are deeply concerned specifically with Title III, Historic Preservation.

October 28, 2026
U.S. Congress, BAAJA

**Central California Yokuts NAGPRA Coalition**

The Central California Yokuts NAGPRA Coalition (Coalition) was formed in August of 2012 to address the rightful return and respectful reburial of Yokuts ancestral remains from federally funded institutions as required by the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and California NAGPRA. The five-member Tribal organization also works together and shares responsibility to minimize adverse effects of federal undertakings and other development projects on Yokuts cultural resources, sacred sites, cemeteries and burials and Traditional Cultural Landscapes.

**The National Historic Preservation Act and Related Laws**

Sixty years ago, almost to the day, Title 54 of the US Code, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was enacted to protect our sacred places and the burial places of our ancestors. The Section 106 regulations of NHPA mandate that Tribes and State governments must be consulted early on in the planning stages of any federal undertaking that could adversely affect our historical and sacred places. Subsequently, our hard-fought efforts and the support of Congress brought about the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act in 1990. These federal laws are interwoven, and only now are we able to complete the return and respectful reburial of thousands of our ancestors held for decades in lockers and storage cabinets in federally funded institutions.

The Tribes learned only recently that Title III of BAAJA threatens all of these protections for our remaining sacred sites and burial places of our ancestors. The Tribes learned this through word of mouth and information sharing by other tribal organizations such as the National Congress of the American Indian and the National Association of Tribal Historic Preservation Officers, not from Congress. Federal agency consultation with Tribes will become optional instead of mandatory, simply by changing the word "shall" to "may" in much of the proposed legislation. If this draft bill becomes law, decades of federal protections will be erased and agencies, or even a single federal employee, not Tribes, will have the authority to decide what is sacred to us. As written, and with no consultation with Tribes, the draft BAAJA bill removes us from the early planning process, thereby putting Tribal sacred places impacted by federal undertakings at risk.

**Request**

As sovereign Tribes, our relationship with the United States is built on the federal trust responsibility, and on our inherent authority over our lands, our people, and our cultural heritage. As Tribal Leaders, we ask Congress to demonstrate its commitment to our government-to- government relationship not merely through words, but through actions. Do not advance legislation that diminishes our voice in protecting our ancestors and our sacred places without first consulting with the Tribal Nations whose foundations, identity, and cultural heritage are at stake.

October 28, 2026
U.S. Congress, BAAJA

Sincerely,

Robert G. Jeff
NAGPRA Coalition Chairperson
Tribal Vice-Chairman
Santa Rosa Rancheria

Deann Kamalani
Tribal Chairperson
Picayune Rancheria

Michelle Heredia-Cordova
Tribal Chairperson
Table Mountain Rancheria

Leo Sisco
Tribal Chairperson
Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Tribe

Neil Peyron
Tribal Chairperson
Tule River Tribe

Octavio Escobedo III
Tribal Chairperson
Tejon Indian Tribe

Hillary Hammond Battles
NAGPRA Coalition Vice Chairperson
Tribal Council Member-at-Large
Picayune Rancheria

cc
The Honorable Adam Schiff
Hart Senate Office Building #112
Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
331 Hart Senate
Office Building
Washington, DC 20510