

February 8, 2023

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary
United States Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Bryan Newland
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs
United States Department of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland and Assistant Secretary Newland:

We write to express serious concerns regarding an ongoing easement dispute in Vilas County between the Lac du Flambeau Tribe and title companies that has left some residents of the Town of Lac du Flambeau unable to come and go from their homes. As you are aware, the Tribe closed roads on the Lac du Flambeau Indian Reservation over long-expired right-of-way issues. It is vital that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) act immediately to facilitate negotiations between the respective parties and work towards a prompt resolution.

Since the 1960s, several right-of-way easements allowed for roads on tribal lands to connect to properties of non-tribal residents. However, the easements expired over ten years ago, and negotiations since then between the Tribe and First American Title Company and Chicago Title, which represent many of the property owners affected by the dispute, have so far failed. On January 31, the Tribe erected barricades on four roads, denying access to residents.

The Tribe has released a public statement that expresses frustrations with a number of parties for failing to give the proper attention to resolving the issue. That statement cites numerous attempts to reach out to BIA's Midwest Regional Office, without response, over several years. This is unacceptable, and we expect immediate engagement from BIA to aid in negotiations. To that end, we also request that you facilitate prompt sharing of appraisal information as part of the negotiation.

The situation is untenable for all parties and requires active involvement from the BIA to reach a resolution. While our offices continue to encourage all parties to act amicably, we ask the BIA to act in a timely matter to avoid further conflict. We ask that you contact the Tribe and title companies today to offer assistance in facilitating good faith negotiations. Further, we ask that you provide updates to our offices throughout negotiations. We appreciate your timely attention to this pressing matter.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
U.S. Senator



Tony Evers
Governor of Wisconsin

cc: Ms. Tammie Poitra, Regional Director, BIA Midwest Regional Office