

Five hundred and thirty-one years ago today, Christopher Columbus went ashore at Guanahani, an island in the Bahamas. That date marked the beginning of an era of European settlement and colonialism, accompanied by widespread destruction of existing American societies.

Today, Native Americans communities face another crisis: climate change. Many tribes are at high risk from climate change. Tribes are especially vulnerable to climate change because they were [displaced](#) from their original homes onto lands that were often marginal to begin with and are becoming more challenging due to climate impacts. A [2021 study](#) confirmed what everyone probably already knew: tribes were generally moved to lands that are more exposed to heat and have less water than their historical homelands. Given heat increases due to climate change, and the tendency of climate change to make arid lands even drier, the relocations often put the tribes at climate change ground zero. In the meantime, energy poverty is widespread in native communities and reliance on fossil fuels is high.

The needs of native communities have not escaped attention in climate policy. Biden's signature climate change law, the Inflation Reduction Act, provides \$720 million in funding earmarked for tribes.

The primary IRA provisions affecting tribes are:

- \$225 million in tribal rebates for high-efficiency electric homes. Rebates provide discounts on a variety of equipment and energy efficiency upgrades, including heat pumps, heat pump hot water heaters, heat pump clothes dryers, induction stoves, electrical panel upgrades, electrical wiring upgrades, and air sealing and insulation.
- \$150 million for tribal electrification. This program will provide financial and technical assistance to Tribes to increase the number of Tribal homes with zero-emission electricity.
- \$225 million for tribal resilience. This program will support habitat restoration and adaptation activities, community directed relocation, and other activities. The Department anticipates spending \$40 million of this funding to support voluntary community-driven relocation efforts.
- \$75 million to support a \$20 billion loan authority. The Tribal Energy Loan Guarantee Program supports Tribal energy financing for the development of energy resources like solar, wind farms, microgrids, and transmission and distribution.
- Beyond these provisions, the Inflation Reduction Act also offers billions of dollars in competitive grants and other funding for which Tribes and Tribal entities are eligible. Tribes also may benefit from several of the law's tax incentives for clean energy.

What is notable about the IRA programs is that they not only provide funding for vulnerable, disadvantaged communities, but that they do so through tribal governments, strengthening their institutional role. This is potentially an important step forward in strengthening those institutions.