

Assessing the DIGITAL Reservations Act:

Addressing the Digital Divide through Spectrum Sovereignty

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Background

- Native Americans on reservations face challenges of connectivity, which is crucial for education, telehealth, and public safety
- Sovereign nations struggle to access spectrum rights on their Tribal lands.
- Spectrum access is limited, with increasing demands despite markets to assign spectrum rights
- The excludable property rights framework has not solved the digital divide

The Challenge

- Tribal lands in the US have low connectivity, and expensive licenses hinder Native Nations from setting up their networks
- Big telecom companies fail to provide effective service in rural areas, worsening the digital divide
- FCC's attempts to enhance tribal access to spectrum fall short of expectations.
- Cost and lack of infrastructure perpetuate disparities in connectivity for Native Americans

The DIGITAL Reservations Act

- The DIGITAL Reservations Act aims to grant Native Nations full and permanent access to spectrum licenses on their lands
- The proposed bill affirms self-management of modern natural resources on tribal lands for the first time in history
- The bill prevents the FCC from selling spectrum rights on tribal lands without the consent of the respective tribal government.
- The legislation seeks to empower Native Nations to bridge the digital divide and provide better connectivity

Conclusions

- The DIGITAL Reservations Act supports tribal self-governance and sovereign management of natural resources, bridging the digital divide
- The proposed legislation would enable Native Nations to establish their own networks for education, healthcare, and emergency services, among other benefits
- The bill seeks to ensure that Native communities are not left behind in the digital age and can participate fully in economic development opportunities

References

- Blackwater et al., "Assessing the DIGITAL Reservations Act: Addressing the Digital Divide through Spectrum Sovereignty," Working Paper, University of Pittsburgh Center for Governance and Markets





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