



Gaining Ground--STOP Act Signed Into Law

December 23, 2022

Dear SAA member,

This is a great day for archaeology, for the Acoma Pueblo who led the campaign on behalf of all Native American tribes, and for cultural resources preservation in general. During the evening of December 21 US President Biden signed into law the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act (STOP Act). There is now an explicit prohibition on the export of objects obtained in violation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) or the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA). With this specific federal law that states traffickers of tribal patrimony may not export their contraband, tribes and US government agencies now have another legal tool to access other countries' law enforcement mechanisms to regain stolen Indigenous property from foreign nations. We can make the sight of stolen tribal objects being auctioned off in foreign nations a thing of the past.

But the law does more—in addition to the export restriction, the STOP Act

1. Increases the maximum penalty for violations of NAGPRA;
2. Creates an export certification system to facilitate the legitimate trade in tribal art;
3. Confirms the authority of the President to request from foreign nations agreements to prevent damage to Native American cultural heritage;
4. Establishes a federal framework in order to support the voluntary return of tangible tribal cultural heritage, including items that could be covered by NAGPRA and ARPA;
5. Establishes an interagency working group to facilitate communication between federal agencies to implement the STOP Act; and

6. Establishes a working group of tribes and Native Hawaiian organizations to assist in the implementation of the STOP Act and other statutes that protect tribal cultural resources.

The enactment of the STOP Act is the result of nearly a decade of hard work by tribes and other supporters of the bill, including the SAA. The process is not over—in the months ahead we will closely monitor the implementation of the law to ensure that it is carried out effectively.

We want to thank all of the thousands of SAA members who took the time to go to our Take Action portal and send letters to their congressional representatives urging them to vote for the STOP Act. Your support played a big role in securing this victory, and your dues ensured that our government affairs program could persevere in its advocacy for this important legislation.

Thank you for being a member of the SAA.

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