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In an address to the Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities conference today, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Kevin Gover attacked the lack of jobs and opportunities on Indian reservations, and pointed out some of the major barriers to economic development on the reservation. "Unemployment on Indian reservations is 49%*. Nearly half of our people are not working, because there are not enough jobs, and not nearly enough opportunity in Indian country. What would happen if half of America were unemployed? During the Great Depression, the answer was to put America back to work through the Works Progress Administration. But instead of a WPA program to provide Indian jobs, we see only shortsighted rhetoric attacking the Tribes and their right to govern themselves.

There are many impediments to progress on the reservation, not the least of which are the attempts by the States to tax and regulate all activities on Indian lands. "States and localities regularly say hat they are putting money into Indian country and not getting anything in return, but nothing could be further from the truth. States contribute less than $226 million in direct assistance to the Tribes. American Indians living on the reservations spend $3 .1 billion off the reservations, Tribal governments spend $1.2 billion on goods and services and reservation based businesses spend $4.4 billion off the reservation." This amounts to $8.7 billion dollars being pumped into State economies directly from American Indians. 'This amount is generated with almost half of American Indians unemployed. We can double these figures if we are successful in creating jobs and economic opportunity for American Indians." State and local taxation, and attempts by Congress to diminish Tribal sovereignty also are dangerous impediments to creating more opportunities for American Indians. "The Tribes are at once being told by the Federal government to pull themselves up by the bootstraps, while at the same time being deprived of the ability to use tax and regulatory policy as economic development tools," stated Gover, 'This is not right, and should not be encouraged. There is a theory that every dollar going to an American Indian falls into a black hole, never to be heard from again, this unfortunately is a ridiculous but widespread concept." Gover pledged the resources of the Bureau of Indian Affairs to create $500 million of new jobs and opportunities for American Indians over the next five years. "We are going to aggressively move forward to create new jobs, streamlining loan processes, and offering technical assistance to Tribes and individual American Indians interested in creating new businesses on the reservation."