



**TRANSCRIPT**  
**of**  
**Hurdles, opposition confront tribes on the cusp of federal recognition**

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**Link to show:** <https://www.nativeamericacalling.com/wednesday-may-28-2025-hurdles-opposition-confront-tribes-on-the-cusp-of-federal-recognition/>

**YouTube:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naLHYcY9FSQ>

**HOST:** Shawn Spruce

**GUEST:** Robert Brevelle

*[Spruce]*

*Our third guest joins us from Leesville, Louisiana, Robert Brevelle, councilman at large for the Adai Caddo Indian Nation. And, councilman Brevelle, some of our listeners might not be familiar with the Adai Caddo Indian Nation. What insights can you share about your tribe?*

*[Brevelle]*

Sure. Yeah. We we are a very small tribe. We are a state recognized tribe in Robeline, Louisiana, which is a Natchitoches Parish, in in Central Louisiana. Our history is pretty interesting, as as I imagine a lot of the tribes' histories are.

We just happen to have a plethora of documentation from all of the the renowned explorers that came to the new world. You know, the very first European explorer to set foot in the US in 1529, he documented leading us and and and told them of our ways and talked quite a bit of our people. And then, of course, La Salle, Iberville, Bienville, Bernard La Harpe, all the explorers that you hear about in the public school system or in college if you study history. You know, all of them met our tribe, all of them documented our tribe. They established, military allegiances with us, trade agreements, referred to us as a nation, called upon us when they needed us for for military aid.

We fought alongside the colonials in the revolutionary war against the British. We fought alongside, you know, our our colonial guests again in 1812. And so, you know, our history has predominantly been in Louisiana even though our native range includes a portion of East Texas. So today where we stand, is we have around 300 members, located in in that central region of of Louisiana, based around the little town of Robeline. The vast majority of our members have never left.

We continue to own land in the area. We have our ancient burial mounds in the area. We still bury our people in some of the same cemeteries we buried them in for hundreds of years, and we still have places of worship we go to that have been there for hundreds of years. And a lot of those places and those geographic features and those areas bear our native names, whether that's a bayou or a lake. You know, all those things continue to bear our names on the federal maps.

We started the federal recognition process a long time ago. We started in the 1970s when we started working with the bureau, and we are still working with the bureau to get our federal recognition. So it's been over 50 years.

*[Spruce]*

*Over 50 years? Now you've recently gotten support for federal recognition from the Caddo Parish Commission. Tell us more about that and what that does for your case.*

*[Brevelle]*

Well, that's kind of a, revisiting of our process, and we've kind of gone back to the drawing board to figure out the best way we can try to move our application forward. We haven't abandoned the normal application process that the bureau conducts, but we are trying to push for legislative action, similar as to the other two guests. And what we did is we approached the commissioners of Caddo Parish, and and we asked them for their support in this process, and they were the first local government entity we approached, and we were very pleased with the amount of support they provided us.

They unanimously, voted and approved the resolution urging the federal government to recognize our tribe. We're also working with some of the other surrounding parishes, including Natchitoches Parish to do the same. And then our plan is to take kind of this grassroots campaign and and to take it to, the state of Louisiana. We've already got the governor's office supporting us and, you know, we already are state recognized. But we'd like to get, you know, the parishes, the the cities, the state, to approach with us hand in hand our our local congressman, which is speaker of the house Mike Johnson, and and to work with us and then to approach president Trump to lead a congressional action for our federal recognition.

*[Spruce]*

*And what do you seek to gain from federal recognition?*

*[Brevelle]*

Well, I I think every tribe and and every person in those tribes has their own reasons, for seeking federal recognition. I can speak for my personal reasons, and it it has mostly to do with with what our ancestors have done. You know, our ancestors were among the founding fathers of Louisiana, Texas, and The United States.

They were they were honorable.

They never went back on their trade agreements or their military agreements. They took in these immigrants from Europe. We fed them. We taught them how to hunt and fish. We protected them from other Indians, and we gave them a place to live and raise their family.

And when they called upon us, we fought alongside them voluntarily. We we helped them capture Baton Rouge, and we helped them capture Western Florida. We were a major force in the battles that occurred in those areas. And then again in 1812, we fought alongside them in the battle of New Orleans. And, so our ancestors including our chief at that time, were recognized for our allegiances and and, given medals and other awards by the the various government entities in the area.

And our honor and our sovereignty were always intact, never questioned.

The US agreed to honor these agreements when it conducted the treaty of 1803, which we all know as the Louisiana Purchase, which means recognizing us as a nation as the Spanish did, as the French did, and as the early, territorial government of Louisiana did. But with this relatively new process, and I say relatively new is because our documented history is over 500 years old. But this new process of federal recognition conducted by the bureau, it does not recognize my ancestors or my tribe. And and even today, over 25% of the members of our tribe serve in the US Armed Forces.

So recognizing our tribe as a sovereign nation, as an ally, and as a friend that it has been since the 1500s is the right thing to do in my mind. You know, we've earned it in every way imaginable, and and those are my reasons for seeking federal recognition.

*[Spruce]*

*Listening to our other guest today, neighboring tribes can either be supportive or they can hinder the process for federal recognition. Councilman Brevelle, what do you get from other tribes in your region? Are they supportive or do you get pushback?*

*[Brevelle]*

They they've been very supportive. I've yet to, meet a member of another tribe that has not been supportive. In our little area of Louisiana, most of the tribes around us are are state recognized tribes, and and many of them are in various stages of fighting for federal recognition. The local, federal recognized tribes include, the Coushatta and the Tunica Biloxi, and and they've been supportive as they have been with all the other state recognized tribes across Louisiana.

We all we all sit on the governor's commission for Native American affairs. Our representative happens to be the secretary of that commission, and then our neighboring state tribe, which is the Choctaw Apache, their chief is the chairman of that commission. So the state tribes in Louisiana play a pretty big role in the Native American affairs, at the state level with support from the federal tribes.

And it also happens to be that since my ancestors and many of the ancestors of other tribes, whether they were the European, like the Spanish or the French or the the Americans who came much later, we've all intermarried and we've all grown up in the same neck of the woods and we're all blood relatives.

And so I count many of the Choctaw Apache and many of the neighboring Tunica Biloxi, as blood relatives to include first cousins. And so we've all been supportive in that regard.

*[Spruce]*

*You mentioned that, what you really seek to gain is just this acknowledgment acknowledgment of being a sovereign nation and acknowledgment of your history. But what about also the benefits that could come with federal recognition for your tribe of about 300 members? I'm thinking of possibly expanded health care opportunities, educational opportunities, perhaps, tribal lands or reservation. What types of opportunities do you see there?*

[Brevelle]

Well, in our in our meetings with our members, we always do place a lot of emphasis on our elders. We have a council of elders that that speak regularly, with the council, and and they present at every one of our quarterly meetings. And, of course, their focus has been on the care of our elders, and that, you mentioned, includes health care. So if there are federal benefits, as being federally recognized, which would provide the tribe, we, of course, are interested in those types of opportunities to work with the government on.

And then for our young people, our only focus with them is education. And whether that's traditional education in the American sense of, going to school and, you know, going on to college or trade school and grad school and those things, as well as an education in their history and their cultural awareness of our tribe and our practices and our religion. Learning all those things are important to us and opportunities there to support that are of course very welcome. But outside of those two, there has really been no interest in some of the other opportunities.

Our tribe and and I think people in general in that part of Louisiana are somewhat self reliant, self sufficient. And so that's kind of always been the view of that part of Louisiana, and I think that rings true in our people. And so other than helping our elderly with medical and helping our young people with education, we really cannot foresee or desire much help beyond that.

[Spruce]

*Okay. That's interesting. Because I am curious about do you see any potential economic opportunities? Because I read your bio, and, sir, you are a very accomplished businessman and entrepreneur. So the wheels have gotta be turning a little bit maybe?*

[Brevelle]

They do. You know, they do. Everything I touch, of course, with all of our life experiences, you kind of touch everything with those experiences in mind. And for me, you know, the economic opportunities for our people, whether that's in, expanding our museum, a library, grants to support that to where we can share our history and share our culture with others and preserve that culture. Those things from a business point of view are at the top of my mind. But there are a lot of ways to skin a cat, right? And we've been able to maintain to do those things without federal grants. And and we hope to continue to be able to do that on some level of self sufficiency.

But, you know, opportunities that the federal government may present to us that are in line with our values, in line with our goals and our beliefs, we are, of course, gonna look at those.

[Spruce]

*I don't think we can understate just how auspicious it is having speaker of the United States House of Representatives Mike Johnson right there in Louisiana. Can you share any details of*

*conversations you've had with the speaker recently or give us any more background on on on how you feel so supported by him?*

[Brevelle]

Well, he's, fairly well acquainted with a couple of members of our council. Our tribal historian, happens to be a good friend of his. And, and at one time, I believe they were close neighbors. And so he has been supportive in a lot of ways as has been some members of his team and and some of his colleagues. Part of that support is what helped with the Caddo Commission effort that you mentioned earlier.

We expect that support to kinda bleed over into Natchitoches Parish and Sabine Parish, and to do something similar like we did in Caddo, Parish. So, from that sense, he's been he's been wonderful to work with, very supportive. And then once we get enough of the grassroots coalition going to approach him and then seek his support at the federal level, at the highest federal levels, and that's congress and the office of the president.

[Spruce]

*What's your timeline? When do you think this could potentially transpire?*

[Brevelle]

Well, I'm a realist. And, of course, I'm a historian as well. So for me, time may be a different measurement than others.

But when I think about our previous chief who's passed and who started this process in the early 1970s and spent a very large part of his fortune, his life's work to get us to this point and to file our initial petition, only to have the bureau continue to ask for more and more documents.

I see the timeline as being a generational timeline, unfortunately. So I do hope that we can accomplish this, in my lifetime so that my children and and our grandchildren can can be recognized for what our tribe has done for the country. But at the same time, I know it is a tough road ahead of us.

[Spruce]

*You mentioned the cost. Is it expensive to push for this effort to gain federal recognition? I I I mean, I'm just imagining probably historians, attorneys, various consultants. I imagine you have a lot of partners and a lot of people that you have to work with.*

[Brevelle]

That's correct. We we keep records on everything. That's one good thing about our people is we love records. And and and whether those records were Spanish, French, American, colonial, or Catholic, I mean, we keep it all, including our own. So back when we started this process in the 1970s, and we filed our petition in 1993, and our petition number, that was designated by the bureau's petition number 138, which ironically doesn't even appear on their website or any of their resources. To even find our petition, you gotta go to the government accountability office. So I'm not I'm not sure what's going on there.

But at the time, leading up to 1993, we spent over \$30,000 collected from our poor members. You know, many of our members in that rural part of Louisiana are are in the agricultural sector,

you know, whether they're farmers or ranchers or farmhands. They they did pull their money together. And then a large portion of that came from our chief, and that was chief Rufus Davis. And we prepared those documents. We submitted it. We actually even got a federal grant after our petition was filed to assist us in the ongoing multi decade process since then. And when we were awarded the grant, we hired two renowned professors, who had previously worked at the bureau. You you think who better to hire to help you in this process, than the people that worked at the agency that has to approve it.

And so we did that. We hired other subject matter experts that had previously worked at the bureau or had worked with other tribes that worked on their process. And then, of course, attorneys and more attorneys. Many of our elders volunteered during that time period to work with these experts, and we responded to the bureau's request for additional documents.

So we depleted the grant. We once again depleted the tribe's funds and the funds of our council members, and still that was not enough. And, we approached a law firm that had a fairly decent track record, and, again, this is twenty years ago now, in getting tribes through the process. And at that time, that law firm wanted a \$100,000 to help us. And the outcome was not guaranteed, and the \$100,000 was a preliminary estimate. And so we did not have those funds, and they put us on the list for pro bono work, and we've never received a callback. And we, of course, have approached other law firms, that are involved in this process to help us.

*[Spruce]*

*Alright. Councilman Brevelle, thank you so much for joining the show today and, sharing your insights. Unfortunately, we're out of time, so we're gonna have to wrap up this conversation.*

*But I wanna thank all of our guests today, vice chairman Sam Robinson, chairman John Lowry, and councilman Robert Brevelle. And join us again tomorrow for a check on the weather with native storm chasers. I hope you'll tune in. Until then, I'm Shawn Spruce. Have a great rest of your day.*

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