

No. 18-11479

**In the United States Court of Appeals
for the Fifth Circuit**

CHAD EVERET BRACKEEN; JENNIFER KAY BRACKEEN; STATE OF TEXAS;
ALTAGRACIA SOCORRO HERNANDEZ; STATE OF INDIANA; JASON CLIFFORD;
FRANK NICHOLAS LIBRETTI; STATE OF LOUISIANA; HEATHER LYNN
LIBRETTI; DANIELLE CLIFFORD,

Plaintiffs-Appellees,

v.

DAVID BERNHARDT, Acting Secretary, U.S. Department of the
Interior; TARA SWEENEY, in her official capacity as Acting Assistant
Secretary for Indian Affairs; BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS; UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR; UNITED STATES OF AMERICA; ALEX AZAR, in his
official capacity as Secretary of the United States Department of Health
and Human Services; UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND
HUMAN SERVICES,

Defendants-Appellants,

CHEROKEE NATION; ONEIDA NATION; QUINULT INDIAN NATION;
MORONGO BAND OF MISSION INDIANS,

Intervenor Defendants-Appellants.

Appeal from the United States District Court for the
Northern District of Texas, Civil Action No. 4:17-cv-00868

**JOINT REPLY IN SUPPORT OF PETITIONS FOR REHEARING
EN BANC**

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Intervenor Defendants-Appellants.

Pursuant to Local Rule 28.2.1, the undersigned counsel of record certifies that the following list of persons and entities have an interest in the outcome of this case. These representations are made in order that the judges of this court may evaluate potential disqualification or recusal.

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2. Oneida Nation (Intervenor-Defendant)
3. Quinault Indian Nation (Intervenor-Defendant)

4. Morongo Band of Mission Indians (Intervenor-Defendant)
5. Navajo Nation (Intervenor)
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7. Frank Nicholas and Heather Lynn Libretti (Plaintiffs)
8. Altagracia Socorro Hernandez (Plaintiff)
9. Jason and Danielle Clifford (Plaintiffs)
10. State of Texas (Plaintiff)
11. State of Louisiana (Plaintiff)
12. State of Indiana (Plaintiff)
13. United States of America (Defendant)
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15. John Tahsuda III, Bureau of Indian Affairs Principal (Defendant)
16. Tara Sweeney, Acting Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs (Defendant)
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INTRODUCTION

Plaintiffs respectfully submit this reply to correct multiple misstatements of law in the response briefs filed by the United States and the tribes (“Respondents”).

First, Respondents renew their repeatedly rejected contention that Plaintiffs lack standing to challenge the very law that regulates them and interferes with their adoption efforts. But Plaintiffs undeniably are harmed by the Indian Child Welfare Act (“ICWA”) and the Final Rule, and the “practical consequence” of this Court declaring ICWA unconstitutional would “amount to a significant increase in the likelihood that the[y] would obtain relief” redressing that injury. *Utah v. Evans*, 536 U.S. 452, 464 (2002). Nothing more is needed.

Respondents also try to reconcile the panel majority’s decision with controlling Supreme Court authority, but in reality, the panel majority broke with Supreme Court precedent and undermined the Constitution’s federalism and equal-protection guarantees. These errors warrant en banc review.

ARGUMENT

I. All Of Plaintiffs' Claims Are Justiciable.

Repeating twice-rejected arguments, the tribes (at 19-21) contend that Plaintiffs lack standing to challenge ICWA and the Final Rule. That is incorrect, and poses no impediment to rehearing these crucial constitutional issues en banc.¹ “[T]he presence of one party with standing is sufficient to satisfy Article III’s case-or-controversy requirement,” and once standing is established for one claim, any plaintiff may argue in its support. *Rumsfeld v. Forum for Acad. & Institutional Rights, Inc.*, 547 U.S. 47, 52 n.2 (2006). The panel correctly held that Individual Plaintiffs have standing to raise the equal-protection claims, and State Plaintiffs have standing to bring the other claims. A12-19. And Plaintiffs also have standing on numerous other grounds.

¹ Indeed, if these standing arguments had any merit, that would only *support* rehearing en banc, because that would mean that the panel should have vacated the judgment below. *See Steel Co. v. Citizens for a Better Env’t*, 523 U.S. 83, 93-94 (1998). Even if there were a serious question as to Plaintiffs’ Article III standing, the correct result would be for the en banc court to “vacate[] the panel opinion,” Fifth Cir. R. 41.3, and allow plenary review of the case, including Respondents’ jurisdictional contentions.

First, State Plaintiffs, as “objects” of the Final Rule’s requirements, have standing to challenge it, *Contender Farms, LLP v. USDA*, 779 F.3d 258, 266 (5th Cir. 2015)—as do Individual Plaintiffs, given that vacatur of the Final Rule would end its application to them in ongoing state proceedings, see *Nat’l Mining Ass’n v. U.S. Army Corps of Eng’rs*, 145 F.3d 1399, 1409 (D.C. Cir. 1998). Plaintiffs can advance *any* argument for why the Final Rule is invalid—including that it implements an unconstitutional statute—and may thereby raise *each* constitutional challenge to ICWA.

Second, the tribes (at 19-20) concede that State Plaintiffs have standing to raise their anti-commandeering and APA claims. They also have standing to bring the non-delegation claim, because at least one tribe in Texas has reordered the placement preferences. A18.

Third, the tribes (at 20) do not deny that the Cliffords have suffered injury-in-fact, but contend that those injuries are not redressable because Minnesota is not a party here. But redressability is satisfied if the “practical consequence” of a ruling in the Cliffords’ favor would “amount to a significant increase in the likelihood that the[y] would obtain relief.” *Utah*, 536 U.S. at 464; see also *Allstate Insurance v. Abbott*, 495 F.3d 151,

159-60 & n.19 (5th Cir. 2007) (injury redressable because state courts, though not bound by federal court, “could be expected to amend their conduct in response to a court’s declaration”). The likelihood of a Minnesota court declining to apply ICWA to the Cliffords would obviously increase if this Court declares ICWA unconstitutional, and Minnesota courts would be bound if the Supreme Court affirmed.

Finally, the Brackeens currently seek to adopt Y.R.J. in state court, where the Navajo Nation insists that ICWA’s preferences bar that placement. *See In the Interest of Y.J.*, No. 02-19-235-CV (Tex. App.). The Brackeens’ injury is thus *ongoing*. The tribes (at 20) protest that Y.R.J. “is not mentioned in the complaint.” But the complaint stated that the Brackeens “intend to provide foster care for, and possibly adopt, additional children.” ROA.444. Moreover, the district court allowed the Brackeens to supplement the record with information about their attempts to adopt Y.R.J. because this was “relevant to [ongoing] subject matter jurisdiction.” ROA.4314 n.3. Finally, the panel took judicial notice of Y.R.J.’s adoption proceedings. A14-16.

Standing poses no obstacle to reexamining the majority opinion’s numerous constitutional errors.

II. The Panel Decision Conflicts With Supreme Court Jurisprudence.

Respondents' attempts to reconcile the panel majority opinion with the Supreme Court's cases all fail. Only rehearing en banc can realign this Court with binding precedent.

1. The United States (at 8) argues that “the Supreme Court and this Court have applied [*Morton v. Mancari*, 417 U.S. 535 (1974)] to uphold” laws with “no obvious, intimate connection to tribal self-government.” But the United States' own cases involve laws that are tightly linked to tribal land and sovereignty. *Washington v. Washington State Commercial Passenger Fishing Vessel Association* allowed the federal government to grant “Indian tribes” preferential fishing rights. 443 U.S. 658, 673 n.20 (1979). *United States v. Antelope* permitted Congress to give tribal courts jurisdiction over crimes committed by “enrolled members” “within the confines of Indian country.” 430 U.S. 641, 645-47 & n.7 (1977). *Moe v. Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes of Flathead Reservation* allowed Congress to authorize tribes to tax tribal members for property “located within the reservation.” 425 U.S. 463, 480-81 (1976). And *Peyote Way Church of God, Inc. v. Thornburgh* held that an exemp-

tion from peyote prohibition for the Native American Church was “a political classification” because Church “membership [was] limited to Native American members of federally recognized tribes,” “most” of the Church’s members lived on a reservation, and each chapter was “incorporated” by a tribe. 922 F.2d 1210, 1212, 1215-16 (5th Cir. 1991). The law thus “single[d] out for special treatment a constituency of tribal Indians living on or near reservations.” *Mancari*, 417 U.S. at 552.

ICWA bears no resemblance to these statutes. It applies even if the child has *no* connection to a reservation or tribe, based solely on the child’s biological connection to a tribal member and tribes’ racially based membership criteria. *See, e.g., Adoptive Couple v. Baby Girl*, 570 U.S. 637, 641 (2013) (discussing ICWA’s potential application to a child that is 3/256 Cherokee with no other connection to any tribe).

The United States (at 6) tries to shield ICWA from constitutional scrutiny by insisting that tribal membership “is not *necessarily* automatic upon birth but *generally* requires an affirmative act of enrollment, which *typically* occurs later than infancy.” (emphases added). In fact, many tribes, including those here, *automatically* deem newborns to be tribal members if they satisfy blood-quantum requirements, Navajo Nation

Code § 701(c), even if *neither* parent is a tribal member, 11 Cherokee Nation Citizenship Act § 11A.

Although the Tenth Circuit rejected this “gamesmanship,” *Nielson v. Ketchum*, 640 F.3d 1117, 1124 (10th Cir. 2011), the Cherokee Nation continues to defend its power to “automatically” enroll every eligible newborn—“without [any] paperwork” or any “request” at all—for “long enough” to allow the “Tribe to step in to” unilaterally impose membership. Pet. 7, 16, *Ketchum*, 132 S. Ct. 2429 (2012), 2011 WL 6019917. Tribes also prohibit minors from relinquishing membership without simultaneously enrolling in a different tribe, *see* Hopi Enrollment Ordinance No. 33 § 11.1(B)(III), or restrict biological parents’ ability to save their children from ICWA by renouncing their membership, *see In re M.K.T.*, 368 P.3d 771, 797 (Okla. 2016), thereby ensuring that the children remain within ICWA’s grasp.

The tribes (at 9) maintain that ICWA is saved because some small number of the descendants of freed Cherokee slaves are eligible for tribal membership. But *Rice v. Cayetano* “reject[ed]” Hawaii’s identical argument that its law was not racial because some inhabitants of the islands in 1778 were not Polynesian but rather came from the Pacific Northwest.

528 U.S. 495, 514 (2000). Moreover, the Cherokee spent decades trying to *remove* the Freedmen’s descendants from its membership rolls so that tribal membership would be limited to those “of Cherokee blood.” *Cherokee Nation v. Nash*, 267 F. Supp. 3d 86, 110 (D.D.C. 2017). The Cherokee gave up this crusade for racial homogeneity only two years ago, when ordered to grant citizenship to the Freedmen’s descendants. *Id.* at 90, 139. The example of the Freedmen only underscores the overwhelmingly racial nature of tribal membership.

2. The United States (at 12-13) contends that ICWA is not unlawful commandeering because it merely preempts inconsistent state law. But to preempt a state law, the federal law must be aimed at *private* actors, *Murphy v. NCAA*, 138 S. Ct. 1461, 1479 (2018), whereas ICWA imposes obligations on state agencies and courts, requiring them to devote hundreds of thousands of dollars and man-hours to conform to federal dictates. *See Indian Child Welfare Act Proceedings*, 81 Fed. Reg. 38,778, 38,839, 38,863-64 (June 14, 2016). Congress thus “unequivocally dictate[d]” what States must do. *Murphy*, 138 S. Ct. at 1478.

The tribes, meanwhile, assert (at 12) that the anti-commandeering principle “does not apply to congressional commands to state courts.” But

just as Congress cannot force States to enact state law, *Murphy*, 138 S. Ct. at 1477-78, it cannot force States to alter their state-court child-custody proceedings, rather than supplying a *federal* cause of action to govern the adoptions.

And, contrary to the tribes' claim (at 12-13), ICWA controls not only state courts, but also state agencies and employees, as Judge Owen's partial dissent recognized. *See, e.g.*, 25 U.S.C. §§ 1912(d)-(f), 1915(e).² ICWA requires States to dedicate their agencies, employees, and resources to carrying out a federal regulatory scheme. It controls procedures, evidence, burdens of proof, parties, records, and the ultimate placement decision—substituting Congress's racial preferences for the child's best interest. That state courts enforce ICWA does not change the fact that Congress forced States to implement ICWA in the first place. ICWA's commandeering of state actors is no different than *Printz v. United States*, where the Brady Act conscripted state actors to carry out back-

² The tribes (at 11-12) contend that ICWA is Spending Clause legislation, but ICWA applies of its own accord—regardless of any funding offered by the federal government.

ground checks. 521 U.S. 898, 904-05 (1997). As in *Printz*, ICWA's commandeering of state actors to carry out the federal government's regulatory scheme is unconstitutional.

3. The tribes (at 16) bizarrely claim that the district court rejected Plaintiffs' argument that ICWA exceeds Congress's power under the Indian Commerce Clause. Just the opposite: The court "GRANTED" Plaintiffs' claim that "Congress did not have the constitutional authority to" enact ICWA "under the Indian Commerce Clause." ROA.4053-54. Congress's "plenary" power over tribes "is not absolute." *Del. Tribal Bus. Comm. v. Weeks*, 430 U.S. 73, 84 (1977). Respondents' arguments would obliterate all constitutional limits on Congress's ability to legislate with respect to Indian tribes.

Finally, the United States (at 12-13) refers to the Treaty Clause as a source of congressional authority, but never identifies any treaty that would permit Congress to enact ICWA.

4. The tribal power to reorder the placement preferences under 28 U.S.C. § 1915(c) is not simply an exercise of tribes' authority over their members (Tribes Br. 18). ICWA controls non-member children, their families, and prospective parents, and requires state courts to give effect

to an Indian tribe’s reordering of ICWA’s preferences. Nor did Congress “incorporate” tribal resolutions through Section 1915(c) (U.S. Br. 15); that provision invites tribes to change federal law—thereby binding States. But Congress may not convey its lawmaking function to another entity. *Loving v. United States*, 517 U.S. 748, 758 (1996).

CONCLUSION

Rehearing en banc should be granted.

Dated: October 30, 2019

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1. This brief contains 1,948 words, as determined by the word-count function of Microsoft Word 2016, excluding the parts of the brief exempted by Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 32(f).

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