

**TESTIMONY OF
Mr. Tracy 'Ching' King, President
Fort Belknap Indian Community
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana**

**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

April 25, 2013

I am pleased to be here today to provide information to this committee on the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service FY 2014 Budgets on behalf of the 7,000 Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Nations tribal members of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation located in North Central Montana.

My testimony today is directed towards the Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations budget of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service and Education programs. Tribal governments, just like state and municipal governments, provide critical services, shape values, and promote jobs and growth on our respective reservations. Historically, federal spending for Indians has lost ground compared to spending for the U.S. population at large but tribal self-governments have proven that the federal investment in tribes pays off. Tribal Councils are the party responsible for our citizens and ultimately the ones most accountable for the economic conditions as well as the protection and safety of our tribal members who reside in our reservation communities. The following information is provided to you through the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council and in collaboration with the tribal programs funded through P. L. 93-638 programs contracted by our tribal government from each of the respective entities.

**BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
CORRECTIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT & TRIBAL COURTS
Detention/Corrections (tribally operated)**

- ◆ Requesting \$1,500,000 in funding for additional staffing and equipment for our detention officers working in our new facility that will be completed in August 2013.

We need 18 staff members to cover rotating shifts, and operation and maintenance of the new facility and our remodeled older facility. The current budget for the Fort Belknap Corrections Division is \$214,000, far less than what we need to operate a secure and safe environment for offenders that will occupy the facilities.

Law Enforcement & Criminal Investigation, & Public Safety

- ◆ We currently offer inadequate salaries for our law enforcement officers. Tribal police departments cannot compete for officers that are paid much higher salaries by county, state, and Bureau of Indian Affairs law enforcement agencies. Once trained in BIA academies, the officers then leave for higher paying jobs which include health insurance coverage and other benefits. The cost of training officers is very high and Tribes must cover the salary of the officer being trained for 12-16 weeks, and also their temporary replacements that provide law enforcement services while officers are at training. Fort Belknap is requesting \$1,750,000 for law enforcement services and criminal investigations as they combat drug abuse on our reservation.

Tribal Courts

- ◆ Requesting \$350,000. to fund needed additional staff positions such as public defenders, associate judges, and presenting officers. We also need to update computer software/data collection systems, provide staff training and to complete the updating technology needs of our court filing system.

LAND & FORESTRY

Trust Natural Resources (Tribal Land Department)

- ◆ Requesting \$2,000,000 to modernize our tribal land department. We need to purchase business solutions that implement technology which would put all of the tribal leases and land holdings onto software programs to make them compatible with the BIA as we prepare for the Cobell Buy Back Program implementation.

Forestry

- ◆ The Fire Management program requires \$400,000 to efficiently operate a Wildland Fire program. Funds are needed to hire temporary workers, upgrade information technology, improve communication systems with portable handheld radios, maintenance on fire suppression trucks and thinning projects for forest protection.

ROADS MAINTENANCE

Roads Maintenance

- ◆ Our roads maintenance department is responsible for maintaining the reservation road system that encompasses the 725,000 acres of our reservation. Our current needs include snow removal, improving the reservation road system with overlay and regular maintenance. The bridges on our roads are near the critical stage of replacement. We also need to purchase equipment for the program. We need \$3,000,000 for these activities.

TRUST LAND MANAGEMENT

Indian Water Rights and Water Compact Settlements

- ◆ We ask that you continue to recognize the Indian Water Rights of Tribes across this country. Fort Belknap is the home of the Winters Doctrine, where Indian reserved water rights began. This is the doctrine that protects and enhances these rights beginning with the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1908. Support for water claims in Congress is now and will continue to be important. The Montana Congressional delegation has introduced the Fort Belknap Water Compact settlement in excess of \$500 million to Congress in May 2011.

Irrigation Projects

- ◆ **Requesting \$1,250,000 for continued operation and maintenance of the Milk River Irrigation Project** that provides quality water services to area farmers and ranchers for stock and crop production.

Litigation Support & Attorney Fees

- ◆ Additionally, **we are requesting \$450,000 for Water Rights Attorney fees funding under CFR 89** to assist the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council with litigation and assistance now that we have submitted our Water Compact to Congress.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

Higher Education Scholarships

- ◆ Higher Education Scholarship funding for Indian students is needed to attract and support individuals into various professions. These students once graduated will come back to reservations and provide quality professional services to our tribal programs and tribal members. Increase funding level by \$20 million nationally.

Tribal College Funding

- ◆ Increase the amount of funding for Aaniiih Nakoda College (formerly Fort Belknap College) and tribal colleges across the nation for students receiving funding in the amount of \$8,000 per student as they currently only receive half of that amount.

Employment and Training Programs

- ◆ Requesting \$2,000,000 for workforce training/development and summer youth employment programs to prepare tribal members for employment, and especially our young adults that would prepare them for future employment. We have over 400 adults and 900 youths needing employable training.

Wildlife & Parks Program - Bison Relocation

- ◆ We are requesting \$300,000 for additional game wardens, equipment, vehicles and staff training for our Fish & Game department. Additionally, we request \$250,000 for the Yellowstone Bison Relocation project to build corrals, provide quarantine testing facilities and purchase vehicles. Total requested is \$550,000.

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

WATER TREATMENT PLANT

- ◆ Fort Belknap requests Operation and Maintenance costs for the following public water supply operations in the reservation communities. On Fort Belknap there are five (5) different water systems that serve the communities of the Agency, Lodge Pole, and Hays. We have a total of 3,000 water users from 591 service connections and it costs \$776,498 annually to operate the system. Limited customer revenue and a small tribally paid subsidy generates \$234,610, leaving a balance of \$543,888, which the Tribe cannot afford. We are experiencing a shortage of operation and maintenance funds. ***We are requesting an annual funding amount of \$750,000.*** to pay the operation and maintenance costs of these systems.

Special Diabetes Programs for Indians & Dialysis Center for Patients

- ◆ Additional funds for our diabetes patients need increased funding to properly diagnose and treat this deadly disease. ***We strongly support a funding level of \$200 million annually for SPDI for Indian Tribes*** that desperately need dialysis centers on reservations as our people have to travel great distances to receive these treatments causing great hardship to them and also a financial burden on tribes that assist dialysis patients in going to their scheduled appointments.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

- Request that you increase the funding to SAMHSA grants to \$15 million nationwide in order that Indian tribes such as Fort Belknap can apply for these funds and services.

Indian Professionals

- We fully support the Indian Health Scholarship funding for Indian students. This is a great opportunity that will assist in attracting and supporting students into the health professions. These students once graduated would come back to reservations and provide high quality medical services to our tribal members.

Suicide and Methamphetamine Treatment and Prevention Initiative

- We fully support the an increase to \$16.4 million for this program. We have had 1 suicide and 4 attempts this past month. We also want the IHS to develop and utilize a distribution plan of these funds in order that all Tribes share equally.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of this committee for taking the time to listen to the concerns and needs of the members of the Gros Ventre and Assiniboine Nations of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation.