

**Written and Oral Testimony of Darnell J. Maria, Board Member  
Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc.  
Submitted to the US Congress:  
HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENTAL  
AND RELATED AGENCIES  
FY 2015 FEDERAL BUDGET REQUEST, SUPPORT AND CONCERNS FOR:  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR (DOI)--BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS (BIA)**

**April 07, 2014**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Darnell J. Maria, Board Member of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., (RNSB) accompanying me is Ms. Carolyn Coho, Board Secretary/Treasurer. Thank you for the opportunity to submit our written testimony for consideration under the DOI-BIA FY 2015 Budget. Our testimony focuses on the following needs: (1) Renovation and Upgrade of the Pine Hill Campus Water System, (2) Installation of Needed Security System for the K-12 Pine Hill School, and 3) Economic Development for our Ramah Navajo Community.

**Request:** We are requesting that Congress approve funding in the 2015 Federal Budget for three of the major needs of the Ramah Navajo Community. 1. Public Water System Upgrade and Maintenance for our Pine Hill Campus: \$1.85 million. 2. Improvements to our school security: \$385,000. 3. Economic Development: \$2.025 million. **Total Request: \$4,410,000.**

**Background:** It was only in the late 1960s when the Gallup McKinley County Public School in New Mexico refused to rebuild a local public school that was condemned and closed, resulting in having the Ramah Navajo people send their children away from their community to other public schools and to boarding schools, some of which were located Out-of-State and their children were only able to come home once or twice a year. It was then that the Ramah Navajo community through their local government established the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., as a nonprofit under New Mexico State law and obtained its 501(c) 3 IRS status. The founding School Board members then traveled to Washington, DC and New York City to lobby Congress and Foundations to raise money for their own community controlled school. When they were successful, it was this effort and others that eventually led Congress to pass the now historic Public Law 93-638 "Indian Self Determination and Education Assistance Act" of 1975 (ISDEA). RNSB has since become the first Indian community to also operate its own Indian Health Service Health Center, and the first Indian community to have its own radio station, sorely needed in our early days when paved roads were non-existent and few people had phones in their remote homes. RNSB is now known throughout Indian Country as a leader in Indian Self-Determination.

It is important to note that RNSB not only governs its K-12 School, but has many other programs that provide vital public services for the Ramah Navajo Community. In this dual capacity, the Board shares responsibilities with the Ramah Navajo Chapter (a political sub-unit of the Navajo Nation) in providing most major services to the Community by contracting federal and state programs. During its 40-plus years of operation, the School Board has established four divisions within RNSB consisting of over 215 employees in our Education, Health, Community Services and Administrative Services Divisions.

**Request No. 1. To Renovate and Upgrade the Pine Hill Campus Water System Estimated Cost: \$1,850,000**

The Ramah Navajo Community located in west central New Mexico is a small and remote rural satellite community geographically separated from the main Navajo Reservation with approximately 3,500 people, who are mainly Ramah Navajos, but also includes other Navajos from the main reservation, Indians from other tribes, Anglos, Hispanics, and Filipinos. Our community is located in a high and dry plateau area over 7,000-feet high. There are no lakes, rivers, streams, nor any dams in our area; therefore, we rely on underground water that must be pumped from an aquifer at least 3000-feet down, pumped up to storage tanks and distributed by underground waterlines.

Upkeep and maintenance has become a major problem that we are now encountering due to the fact that our waterlines are over 40-years old and are beginning to rust, corrode and break. Most of our water facilities were constructed when the School and other facilities were built in the early 1970's. Even one waterline break will cause our K-12 School to close down for a day or longer, thus impacting learning at all levels and we have to also close our health center which impacts the health of our patients because it is the only healthcare provider within a 50 mile radius.

Just a brief tour through our School campus and nearby staff housing will show 10-12 sites that reveal where broken water lines had to be dug up and repaired. The cost of the repairs is high and continues to rise. In this period of low precipitation from both snow and rainfall, it is critical that our water supply be maintained at acceptable levels of storage capacity for domestic use, sanitary health and fire suppressants. The quality of the water impacts the health of our community which is already at a disparity. Out of a population of 3500, our health center has 519 patients with diabetes, (148/1000); every year on average 7 people are diagnosed with some type of cancer, (2/1000); birth defects on average is 4.5 per 40 births per year (112.5/1000). This past year, we lost two Elders to weather exposures because they did not indoor plumbing and were still using outhouses.

In addition, our public water system needs to upgrade its water treatment facility to keep in compliance with water regulations. There are excess amounts of arsenic and iron in the water from our deep underground wells. We need to install a centralized station for blending the water to stay within the U.S. EPA regulations and a monitoring system to check the piping, wells, valves, water treatment and water tanks. In order to achieve proper maintenance of our water system, we also need the following: (1) a new replacement well since one of the two wells providing water to the tank that services the K-12 Pine Hill School is now inoperable. This includes water for all the School's programs, buildings, and staff housing units, as well as for the nearby businesses and community homes. The estimated cost for one deep well is about \$750,000. (2) New Waterlines. Our underground waterlines that serve the School, staff housing, and other facilities need to be replaced.

We calculated the following costs for the water system upgrades and renovation:

1. New Well Support Facilities:	\$ 300,000
2. New Well:	\$ 750,000
3. Design and Management:	\$ 367,686
4. Construction and Inspection:	<u>\$ 432,314</u>
Total:	\$1,850,000

**Request No. 2. To Install Needed Security Systems for the K-12 Pine Hill School. Estimated Costs: School Fire Alarm, Bell, and Communication System: \$385,000, and: Protective Fencing around the School: \$150,000. Total Cost: \$535,000.**

The K-12 Pine Hill School, under the direction of the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., has major issues and concerns when it comes to the safety and security of our students, staff and visitors for the following reasons:

1. The Pine Hill School has had no school fire alarm, bell, or communication system in operation for more than four years. You would think that we would get better response from the owner of the School, the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), on these issues. Safety of our students is the main concern of everyone at the Pine Hill School. Every year teachers beg the administration for a bell system, so students can be held accountable to getting to class on time. The amount of time our students are cheated out of class time is staggering. Security guards, teachers, and other staff members spend an enormous amount of time just telling students to get to class every day.
2. The lack of protective fencing around the school allows anyone to walk through and have access into many classrooms and buildings without getting authorization from office personnel. Just a month ago, we had a lock down situation due to a person carrying a gun on the backside of our campus. Two people were threatened by the weapon and found refuge with campus security. It could have easily been a bad scenario if this gunman chose to follow his victims. Additionally, there are regular incidences of drug trafficking on campus due to no security fencing. No fencing allows students to leave campus without proper checkout procedures. These types of situations are happening more frequently and, again, there is no barrier to keep our students safe.

In February 2014, a yearly “Pine Hill School Quality of Education Survey” was completed by 289 community members, parents, students, and staff members. The survey showed 56% feel students are not safe at our School. Also, the survey showed that 59% are unsure or feel the conditions of our buildings and insufficient space of our facilities is detrimental to the education of students.

**Request No. 3: To Promote the Community’s Economic Development Through Participation In the Area’s Construction of Homes and Buildings. Estimated Cost: \$2 Million**

It is extremely difficult to promote economic development on Indian reservations especially if they are located in very remote rural sites such as ours. We have a 70% unemployment rate and we have no or very little tax base because Indian tribes and lands are usually exempt from being taxed; because Indian land are considered federal trust meaning that it cannot be sold or mortgaged; and the remote rural sites mean that any type of business or construction firms must require its workers to travel great distances and lodge at the nearest motels and hotels that are few to none on most reservation sites. 30% of our community has no transportation to commute for employment. Therefore, many factors come into play for any business or construction project to be feasible and affordable.

Fortunately, two such factors have now come into play for the Ramah Navajo Community. First, a building at the nearby town has become available. Second, a manufacturing opportunity was

recently identified that can be located at this site that can provide an economic development opportunity.

The building purchased for \$350,000, will need to be completely renovated in the estimated amount of \$1.2 M in order for it to be converted into a manufacturing business. This renovation will take at least two years because so many items will have to be done to make it suitable for a manufacturing site.

Another manufacturing business we would like to establish for our community is the manufacturing of structural insulated wall panels for homes and buildings that can be manufactured to the buyer's specifications and shipped directly to the building sites in and around our community, including out-of-state sites. This venture will address two needs in our community – affordable housing, jobs for 15 to 20 people and a source of revenue for our organization to develop other sustainable initiatives.

This type of manufacturing business will be very suitable to the Ramah Navajo Community for several reasons. First, jobs are very scarce in this community with only RNSB, the Ramah Navajo Chapter, and a few local businesses such as cafes, gas stations, and the Ramah Public Schools offering employment. Second, manufacturing jobs involving substantial physical labor fits right into the type of work that Ramah Navajo people are accustomed to. Third, since salaries offered on reservations such as ours are very low, the low salaries that will probably be offered will not be a problem in acquiring enough community workers.

The estimated costs:

1. Attorney to Acquire Approvals from State, County, Town Tribal Governments:	\$ 150,000
2. Acquisition of Needed Licenses from All Governments:	\$ 75,000
3. Architect's Renovation Designs:	\$ 150,000
4. Hazardous Contamination Cleanup:	\$ 400,000
5. Renovation Construction Work:	\$ 500,000
6. Manufacturing Start-up Cost	<u>\$ 750,000</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,025,000</b>

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for the Ramah Navajo School Board, Inc., I would like to express our appreciation for your support for our community endeavors that will help us become more self sufficient. I hope that our testimony will help you better understand the situation of our community as with many other American Indian tribal communities. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

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