

**Written Testimony of
Fred S. Vallo Sr., Governor
Pueblo of Acoma
House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee
FY 2015 Federal Indian Programs Budget
Monday, April 7, 2014**

Requests for additional funding and/or support:

- 1. 35% Relative Decline in Federal Spending on BIA Programs**
- 2. Indian Roads and Bridges**
- 3. Smaller IHS Hospitals**
- 4. Cultural Preservation**
- 5. Water Resources Studies**
- 6. Traditional Irrigation Systems**
- 7. Johnson O'Malley Program**
- 8. *Carcier* "Fix"**

Introduction. The Acoma people are an ancient people. We have lived at Acoma Sky City, our mesa-top home, for at least 1000 years, making it the oldest continuously inhabited community in the United States. We are proud to be U.S. citizens and proud that we retain the culture, language and beliefs of our ancestors from a time long before the establishment of the United States. Acoma Sky City is the heart of our community. Acoma religious, cultural and social life revolves around Acoma Sky City, both on a daily basis and during festival times. Acoma Sky City is one of only 28 National Trust for Historic Preservation sites, and has received numerous other designations including National Landmark status and listing as a World Heritage Site. One of the youngest historic buildings at Acoma Sky City is a Spanish mission that is, itself, over 360 years old. However, far older structures remain, with the oldest integrated into a three-story row of adobe buildings just off Sky City's central plaza. Based on our research, these traditional Acoma homes are likely the oldest continuously inhabited homes in the United States.

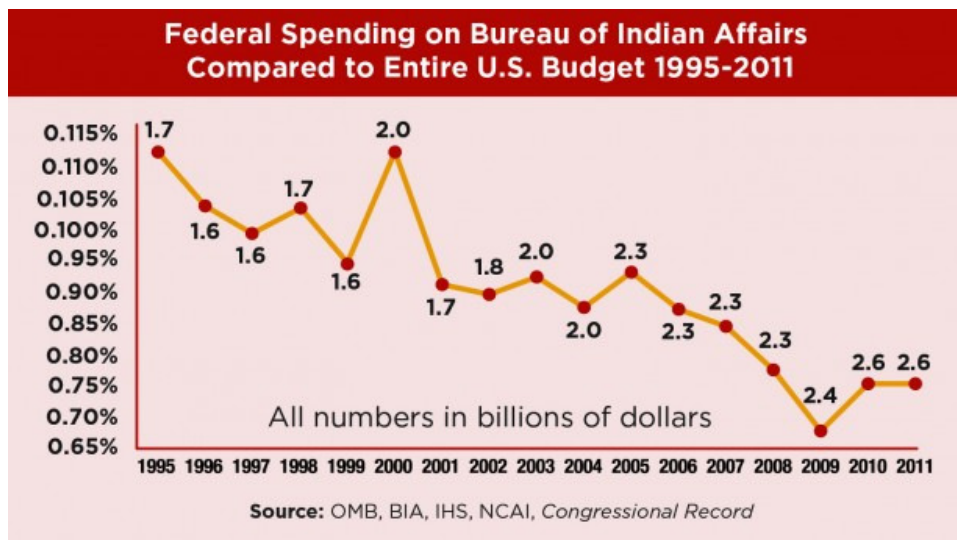
The Trust Responsibility. As this Subcommittee understands, the relationship between the United States and Indian Tribes is unique. Because of the course of history, there has arisen a trust responsibility on behalf of the United States to support Indian Tribes in our efforts to develop and maintain thriving, healthy communities. Regrettably, that responsibility has not been fully met, although I would like to thank this Subcommittee for frequently proposing increased funding levels for Federal Indian programs. I ask the Subcommittee to consider what it would take to fully meet that responsibility and to stand strong in defense of America's first commitment, which is to its Native peoples.

The Lincoln Canes and the Government-to-Government Relationship. Additionally, Tribes are not like other groups within American society. We are sovereign governments and have a government-to-government relationship with the United States. Every Pueblo governor carries a cane from Abraham Lincoln, which was specifically presented to the

governors 150 years ago to acknowledge our sovereign authority over our lands and our people. This cane is a physical embodiment of the recognition of our status and of the commitment of the United States to protect and respect our sovereign rights, as well as to support the well-being of our communities.

For most of the budget areas set forth below, I have set forth a description of a real-life example from Acoma of the need.

1. 35% Relative Decline in Federal Spending on BIA Programs. Set forth below is a chart from an article that appeared in Indian Country Today. As you can readily see, as a percentage of the overall Federal budget, BIA funding has declined from 1995 to 2011 by 35%! Basically, funding for other Federal programs has risen substantially in that period, but the BIA programs have not received a proportionate increase!



2. Indian Roads and Bridges – addressing crumbling infrastructure and building critical new infrastructure:

Mesa Hill Bridge – A Growing Safety Concern. Acoma is bisected by a major trans-continental rail line. With over 80 large trains passing through the reservation everyday, but no bridge over the tracks, Acoma has experienced significant safety issues as the hospital is on the north-side of the tracks, while the school, Head Start, government and Acoma housing areas are on the south-side. Acoma seeks inclusion of the Mesa Hill Bridge as a funding priority in the Highway Act reauthorization legislation.

3. Smaller IHS Hospitals – Funding Health Care at the Front Line.

Turning Around The Indian Health Service Hospital At Acoma. The Acoma-Cañoncito-Laguna Indian Health Services Facility (ACL hospital) provides critical health care services to the Pueblo of Laguna and the Pueblo of Acoma, as

well as services to the I-40 corridor and to surrounding communities. However, the quality and quantity of services offered by the ACL hospital has declined markedly in recent years, resulting in an adverse effect on the health status of the two Pueblos, which already suffer from high rates of diabetes and other serious medical conditions. ACL officials recently informed Acoma that there are over 50 unfilled positions at the hospital. Acoma and Laguna continue to examine the option of taking over management of the hospital. It is Acoma's sense that the IHS has made a calculation that it is more economically efficient to fund a handful of centralized facilities, then to maintain standards at the smaller facilities located in many Indian communities. While that might be economically efficient, it comes at the price of providing quality care within many Native communities, forcing patients to travel substantial distances and thus creating one more hurdle to assuring adequate care.

4. Cultural Preservation – A need to fund this area before irreversible development errors are made.

Uranium Mining On Mt. Taylor. Acoma remains deeply concerned about the potential impact of renewed uranium mining on Mt. Taylor – a mountain sacred to the Acoma people. Our past experience teaches us that uranium mining is dangerous to individuals, to families and to communities. Mining proponents claim that uranium mining can “now” be done safely, but so far they have just asserted that this is so, they have not demonstrated that it is so, much less demonstrating it to the high degree of scientific certainty necessary to allay Acoma concerns. Acoma has engaged in direct discussions with the mining companies and asked them to support additional hydrologic studies, as well as to work with Acoma to prevent damage to cultural sites. Acoma asks that Federal officials assure that no short cuts are taken in examining mining proposals and that they urge the mining companies to work closely with Native communities to fully address their concerns. Acoma believes that the mining companies and the United States have an ongoing obligation to clean up the environmental damage created by past uranium mining. Attempts to link such clean up to the start up of new mining operations are morally faulty. The obligation to clean up is independent of the question of whether renewed mining should be allowed. *It is very important to increase funding to the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer program within the National Park Service to assure cultural preservation issues are fully addressed.*

5. Water Resources Studies – in the Arid West Water is Gold.

Water Resources Development Act Reauthorization – Cost Waivers. Acoma supports amending WRDA to provide a waiver of up to \$500,000 for the tribal share on watershed studies. Acoma and other tribes cannot afford the current 50% cost match and yet these studies are critically important before other development can advance.

6. Traditional Irrigation Systems.

Rio Grande Pueblos Irrigation Infrastructure Improvement Act Funding.

Congress enacted the Pueblo Irrigation Infrastructure Act as Section 9106 of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. That Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the irrigation infrastructure of the Rio Grande Pueblos. It also authorized the funding of projects to correct deficiencies identified by that study. The implementation of this Act will favorably affect Pueblo traditional lifestyle and culture, which for hundreds of years has been based on agriculture and irrigated lands. However, minimal funding has been allocated for implementation of this Act. Acoma requests that this Act receive substantial funding.

7. Johnson O'Malley Program. The JOM programs provides supplementary educational service/assistance to meet the unique and specialized educational needs of Indian children attending Public Schools by promoting student achievement and incorporating Native American languages and culturally based educational activities in the learning process. In 1995 the Bureau of Indian Affairs froze the student count, effectively placing a moratorium on the establishment of new JOM programs despite that the fact that the Indian student population has increased overall and more school district have been established. The Johnson-O'Malley Program is the only federal program that by law (25 CFR Part 273) gives "vested authority" to the parent committees to design and implement their own JOM programs. Based on a need assessment, each plan is tailored to meet the unique and specialized educational needs of Pueblo children to ensure that they reach their educational goals.

8. Support the *Carciari* "Fix." Although there is no question that Acoma was "under Federal jurisdiction" in 1934, and thus is not subject to the immediate harmful effects of the Supreme Court's decision in *Carciari v. Salazar*, it is still important that this holding be overturned by Congressional legislation. The President has included *Carciari* "fix" language in his FY 2014 budget, and this Committee strongly supported "fix" language earlier, including it within the FY 2011 appropriations bill. Passing this legislation is the right thing to do, and will help prevent numerous jurisdictional and other uncertainties that would hamper many of our fellow tribes.

Conclusion. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony before this Subcommittee. Your work is of great importance to America's Native peoples and it is greatly appreciated.