

**TESTIMONY OF JESSICA BURGER, TRIBAL MANAGER
LITTLE RIVER BAND OF OTTAWA INDIANS
BEFORE THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT and RELATED AGENCIES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APRIL 8, 2014**

Chairman Simpson, respected members of the Committee:

I am Jessica Burger, Tribal Manager of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians (LRBOI). I am honored to present this testimony on behalf of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, regarding our views and priorities for the fiscal year (FY) 2015 President's Annual Budget Request. Our Ogema (Chief), Mr. Larry Romanelli, regrets that he was unable to travel here from Manistee, Michigan, our homelands, to deliver this testimony himself.

LRBOI was pleased to see the commitment of the Administration to "Stand with Indian Country" in its overall requests for both the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Indian Health Services (IHS); increases over the 2014 enacted level of \$34 million and \$200 million respectively. These increases will enhance efforts at Little River Band and across Indian Country to further address the disparities that continue to exist in public service and public health delivery to our people. These increases demonstrate a commitment of the United States to restore and heal relations with the Indian Nations. We see this as positive steps in the United States efforts to live up to its promises; the restoration of our governance and self-determination through the assistance of budget priorities to create successful, prospering communities. LRBOI is also appreciative that many of the increases are the direct result of Tribal Consultation; we see that when we come to the table with workable solutions and meaningful requests, our words carry weight and result in actions.

LRBOI believes in the strength of Tribal Nations. As a government, LRBOI contributes to the State of Michigan's economy and the local municipalities surrounding our reservation lands in taxable assessments (PILT, 2% assessment to the state of Michigan), payroll through our business developments and charitable entrepreneurship approximately \$26 million dollars annually. Inclusive of the strength of federal dollars the Tribe receives through PL. 93-638 Indian Self-Determination Self-Governance agreements, grants and other revenues that support over employment positions within the LRBOI government and its public service/public health delivery, this contribution becomes \$35 million. LRBOI is actively working to build and sustain a strong local and regional economy, in addition to our own community's growth; we employ over 1300 in Manistee County among a total population of just over 8,500 residing within it. This is our commitment to full partnership in government-to-government relationships. Our collaborative efforts promote economic opportunity by leveraging dollars; homeownership, local tax base and local industry are dependent on us, just as we are dependent on federal dollars to accomplish real work.

LRBOI agrees with and requests the Committee implement the Presidents' request for full contract support costs (CSC) for both the BIA and IHS; \$251 million and \$617 million respectively. These dollars are part of our government's ability to recruit, retain and sustain full time employment positions and service providers. CSC allows us to be full partners within our local economy; they pay for the costs of our public service and health care delivery systems. We do urge the Committee to also stand with Indian Country and ask the Administration to settle past claims as expeditiously as possible. This must be done to ensure program growth to meet the changing needs of our families, close the gaps in health care

provision, to protect the rights of our citizens and to manage our resources in a sustainable manner. LRBOI also respectfully asks the Committee to consider a recommendation in the budget to require ongoing consultation with Tribes to assist in determining the true appropriation in subsequent budget years in an effort to permanently address and reduce CSC shortfalls in the future.

LRBOI also supports the inclusion of the Tiwahe (Family) Initiative in the President's budget request. This initiative closely mirrors our own initiative to address poverty, the basis for many of the issues that impact our population; we call it the *Transition To Success*. By recognizing that poverty is a 'disease' in Indian Country, through a case managed approach integrating socio-economic assessments, education and job aspirations, factors such as family violence, substance abuse and health status into an individualized plan to promote family welfare, LRBOI wishes to break the cycle of poverty in our generation for the sake of the Seventh Generation. LRBOI will accomplish this through job training, education and skill building. We will utilize our employment and assistance network to identify the challenges at hand for our population living at or below the poverty level, to enhance the likelihood of the individuals' success in a planned approach, with an end goal to promote family stability, ultimately strengthening our Little River Band community. LRBOI asserts that \$12 million is not adequate at this time to allow for this initiative to reach broadly across Indian Country. We would recommend the Committee support increasing that amount in FY 2015 to \$20 million to create demonstration projects that enhance collaborations between tribal, county and state governments and other resources such as non-profit organizations.

LRBOI also supports the President's request for increases in the BIA Natural Resources budget for Indian Country of \$5 million. Natural Resources are a priority for the Little River Band; we have much to lose as stewards of one of the world's largest fresh water resources. As the enforcement and management agency for the 13 million acres of Ceded Territory and its adjoining waterways in Michigan, LRBOI plays a vital role in wildlife and habitat sustainability for all of the twelve Tribes in our state. LRBOI has been an integral part in the effort to restore sturgeon to our native waters, to protect the Great Lakes Region from the threat of invasive species on our lands and waters and to ensure that the rights of individual Indians to continue to hunt and gather indigenous food and medicine resources. We ask the Committee to support this request in the budget authority, recognizing this is a modest increase to support monumental work.

LRBOI agrees with the President; it is necessary to increase the overall budget for the Indian Health Service. It is indeed time to The President's FY 2015 budget request at \$4.6 billion would add approximately \$200 million above the enacted 2014 level. This is admirable, but the amount is not enough to address the disparities that continue to persist in the health status of Indian people in comparison to the rest of the United States. In comparison to per-capita federal health care spending, Indian Country lags behind; \$2,896 dollars per individual, while national health care spending is at \$7,535. LRBOI believes it is time to incorporate the recommendations of the National Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup and supports the implementation of a needs based budget over the next 12 years of \$27.6 billion, beginning with an authorization of \$5.3 billion in FY 2105. As health care status is of utmost importance to LRBOI, we support the recommended increases as forwarded by the Budget Formulation Workgroup for the following priorities:

<i>Purchased and Referred Care (formerly CHS)</i>	<i>\$181.2 million</i>
<i>Hospitals and Clinics</i>	<i>\$119.6 million</i>
<i>Mental Health</i>	<i>\$ 47.9 million</i>
<i>Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services</i>	<i>\$ 31.7 million</i>

LRBOI operates a small ambulatory facility serving approximately 1300 users in a 9-county contract health service delivery area (CHSDA). As we are located within a rural setting, specialty provider

services must be purchased outside of our primary care provider base. We are reliant on the ability to secure necessary specialty practice with purchased and referred care appropriations. While we appreciate the President's requested \$15.4 million increase, in reality, this falls short of the true need to purchase these services in Indian Country. The workgroup's recommendation is a truer reflection of the cost of those services. LRBOI encourages the Committee to review the President's request and seriously consider enacting the workgroup recommendation. Similarly, LRBOI asserts that direct service health care delivery, hospitals and clinics, mental health and substance abuse services are the core priority needs of the people we serve. We recommend and urge the Committee to adopt the workgroup's recommendations in their budget authorization.

Little River Band believes in the partnership that has evolved out of the federal Indian trust relationship that was founded in the treaties signed by our people in 1836 & 1855, which were reaffirmed in 1994. Little River Band believes that it is the obligation of our federal health partners to advocate on behalf of the Tribes they are entrusted to serve for the necessary resources to achieve improved health status and quality of life for all American Indian/Alaska Native peoples. The items outlined in this testimony are just a few of the priorities the Little River Band wishes the Committee to consider in its review of the President's budget request. Little River Band believes as a Tribal nation, we have an obligation to inform, advise and actively engage in meaningful consultation to achieve the collective vision that all of America prospers when Tribes are successful; part of this success is realized through the appropriations process. LRBOI believes in the vision articulated by the President's Executive Order establishing the White House Council on Native American Affairs (June 26, 2013), "*...tribal self-determination—the ability of tribal governments to determine how to build and sustain their own communities—is necessary for successful and prospering communities.*" LRBOI has demonstrated or willingness to be full partners through our governmental actions and business entrepreneurship. We are working to be vital partners in the local and regional economy; service delivery is an integral part of that effort. We seek the assistance of the federal government to ensure this vision can be achieved through meaningful appropriations to assist sustainable public service and health service delivery programs. It will take the efforts of all of the partners working together to realize that vision.

Little River Band appreciates the opportunity to present this testimony to the Committee today on these important matters. I am happy to answer your questions.

KchiMiigwech (Many thanks)
Gdagaanaagaanik (All Our Relations)