



Chairman Ken Calvert

*Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

FY 2016 Budget Hearing: American Indian and Alaska Native Programs

March 24, 2015

Opening Statement as Prepared

Good morning and welcome to the first of four public witness hearings specifically for American Indian and Alaska Native programs under the jurisdiction of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee.

I especially want to welcome the distinguished tribal elders and leaders testifying today and in the audience. I can assure you that your voices are heard by this Subcommittee. Just as they have been in recent years under the chairmanships of Democrats and Republicans alike, American Indian and Alaska Native programs will continue to be a priority for this Subcommittee.

The Administration has put this Subcommittee in a tight spot with regard to the 2016 budget, by raising expectations throughout Indian Country that we will struggle to meet. The President's budget disregards the spending caps that he signed into law. That is how he is able to propose a \$323 million increase for Indian Affairs and a \$461 million increase for the Indian Health Service—all without an offset. Current law requires discretionary spending to stay relatively flat in fiscal year 2016 in comparison to 2015. Therefore, this Subcommittee's challenge will be to find the money from within to pay for the have-to-do's without cutting the popular nice-to-do's by so much that we can't pass a bill.

Most of you have traveled a long way to be here this week. I hope that you'll seize the opportunity to meet with other Members of Congress outside of this Subcommittee, including not just those representing where you live now, but those representing adjacent Districts, and even those representing the Districts of your forefathers. Honoring this nation's Trust obligations is a responsibility all Members of Congress share whether we have Indian tribes in our Districts or not.

Before we begin, I have a bit of housekeeping items to share. Committee rules prohibit the use of outside cameras and audio equipment during these hearings. That is to ensure that anything said here today is not unfairly reproduced out of context. An official hearing transcript will be available at GPO.gov.

I will call each panel of witnesses to the table one panel at a time. Each witness will have five minutes to present his or her oral testimony. Each witness's full written testimony will be included in the record, so please don't feel pressured to cover everything in five minutes.

Finishing in less than five minutes may even earn you brownie points with the chairman. We will be using a timer to track the progress of each witness; when the light turns “yellow,” the witness will have one minute remaining to conclude his or her remarks. When the light blinks red, I will have to ask the witness to stop. Members will be provided an opportunity to ask questions of our witnesses, but, because we have a full day ahead which may be interrupted by votes, I request that we try to keep things moving in order stay on schedule.

Finally, let me take a moment to wish a happy birthday to our Subcommittee’s Minority Clerk, Rick Healy, and to thank him in particular for his tireless efforts to improve the lives American Indians and Alaska Natives. With that, I thank you all again for being here today and I’m happy to yield now to our distinguished Ranking Member, Betty McCollum, for any opening remarks she would like to make.

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