

**TESTIMONY OF DAVE ARCHAMBAULT, II  
CHAIRMAN, STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND  
RELATED AGENCIES CONCERNING BIA, BIE AND IHS  
FY 2016 APPROPRIATIONS  
March 24, 2015**

On behalf of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, I am here to discuss appropriations for fiscal year 2016. The Tribe greatly appreciates the work of this Committee and your efforts to address the needs of Indian country. Progress is being made, and your support makes a difference in the lives of our people. At the same time, we continue to face great challenges which cannot be met in a single appropriations cycle. We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee in seeking a better future for Indian country.

This past year has in many ways been a remarkable year for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and especially for our youth. In June, several of our outstanding youth had an opportunity to meet with President Obama and the First Lady on our Reservation – as the President and First Lady honored us with their historic trip to Standing Rock. For these young Tribal members, this was no ordinary ‘meet and greet’ with a public official. Instead, it was a chance for these youth to sit down in a private setting for a meaningful discussion with the President and First Lady, regarding the many challenges they face growing up on the Reservation, and their hopes and dreams for the future. Our youth told the President and First Lady about the wide range of economic and social problems that are so prevalent in their communities – as poverty, violence, drug use, and suicide are all too common. Every one of these kids has faced circumstances in their families or their neighborhoods that no child should have to endure. And yet, each of these courageous youth had confidence and high aspirations for the future.

The President was clearly moved by the stories of our young Tribal members – and he said he would not forget our youth. As a first step, he invited an even larger group of Standing Rock youth to come to visit him in the White House. This group of 18 youth came to DC this past fall. They met with a broad range of high level federal officials, including spending a couple of hours with Interior Secretary Jewell. And everywhere they went, our youth told their stories about the realities of Reservation life, the challenges they face and the vast unmet needs on the Reservation. Of course, it was not all business, as the President and First Lady also took our youth to a pizza place for lunch.

I was extremely proud of the courage, maturity and wisdom of these Tribal youth – and I think we all can learn from them. I mention these events today because I believe the most important question the Committee can address is this – what can we do to address the needs of Indian youth? This is not a partisan issue – we all owe it to our children to do all we can to see that they have positive opportunities for the future. After meeting with our youth, the President included in his budget proposal several key initiatives specifically regarding Native Youth. We ask for the Committee’s support of these initiatives. In addition, we hope that the Committee will support the full range of programs and initiatives – including education, law enforcement and health care – that will enable our youth to thrive.

**Native Youth.** The President’s budget proposes a youth initiative that he calls “Generation Indigenous,” – a comprehensive approach to addressing the barriers to success faced by Indian youth. This includes supporting Native youth in community development projects and leadership training, convening a White House conference on Native Youth and more. The Generation Indigenous initiative will raise the profile of Native Youth issues nationwide, and will provide a framework for supporting the good work of Native Youth in their communities. We need to encourage a new generation of Native leaders, and Gen-I provides a positive and thoughtful approach to doing just that.

One part of Gen-I is the President’s Tiwahe initiative – which is a program to strengthen Indian families and promote family stability – focusing in large measure on the delivery of services to children in a coordinated and comprehensive way. The concept is to bring together the expertise of different agencies to provide a working partnership that leads to more effective services.

One of the greatest needs in this regard is for more child protection workers and child welfare workers to assist children whose families are in crisis. Many of the children on our Reservation – including some who met with the President – face unstable situations at home and need the support of professional social workers to ensure their safety and well-being. Providing more funding for the Tiwahe initiative and for social service programs affecting Native youth will have a lasting impact in Indian country. We urge the Committee to support these initiatives and programs, including the requested \$122 million for Tiwahe, to help our Native youth.

**Education.** As the Committee is well aware, high quality education is a fundamental requirement for success in today’s world. To provide our youth with the education they deserve, we must do two things. First, we must provide the resources necessary to make quality education possible. Indian students should no longer be housed in crumbling and unsafe school buildings, with limited programs, outmoded equipment and last century’s technology. Let’s level the playing field and provide excellent teachers and modern programs in effective spaces for our children. And second, we must empower tribes to decide the best way to educate their own children. Federal dictates are not the answer. Each tribe must be enabled to bring the richness of its culture and local knowledge to the education of its children. Both components – adequate resources and true tribal self-determination – are vitally important to providing effective education in Indian country.

Historical patterns of Indian education have not been successful. We know that the conventional models of education have simply not worked. The data indicates that only about 15% of Indian children in the United States are reading at grade level, and the dropout rate for Indian students is over 50%. These facts are unacceptable, and they signal a need for a new direction. We all might do well to look for an example to the Cut Wood School in Browning, Montana, where only the Blackfoot language is spoken up to 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. Cohort studies show that these students have a 95% graduation rate from high school. The Cut Wood School shows that we can do better for our students in Indian country.

As far as resources needed for education in Indian country, the President’s budget provides some much-needed increases, totaling \$94 million. A portion of these funds would help tribes enhance their educational programs, including for language immersion schools. We are

very proud of our own language immersion program at Standing Rock – and young students from our program sang traditional songs for the President on his visit to our Reservation. The budget also includes an increase of \$4.5 million for higher education scholarships and adult education, and an increase of \$34.2 million for modern technology for remote BIE schools – like those at Standing Rock. We urge the Committee to fully fund all of these programs, which will help provide vitally needed resources.

I believe in the fundamental principle of self-determination. But in the area of Indian education, there remain some major impediments. The testing associated with “Adequate Yearly Progress” from the federal No Child Left Behind statute has been imposed on tribes and we have seen how much this adversely impacts our students. Tribes need the flexibility to develop and implement their own learning systems, with appropriate tribally-designed measurements of progress. We know that amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act are needed – and we will be seeking action by Congress in this regard. But other impediments to our goals in Indian education are found in the Interior Appropriations Act – particularly the language that generally prohibits Tribal Charter Schools. We urge you to delete that language, so that tribes can move forward to establish their own Tribally run charter schools, as a vehicle to implement true self-determination regarding Indian education.

In seeking the best education for our children, we are asking for your help. According to Albert White Hat, one of our esteemed elders who recently passed away, we use the Lakota word “Unsica” which means to ask someone for assistance. Each of us needs assistance in some way, and it is an honorable thing to request assistance from one another. In this spirit, we request your assistance regarding Indian education.

**Public Safety and Justice.** Many of the challenges faced by our youth stem from violence and crime in our communities. We need the resources to address these challenges – including increased law enforcement staff and court staff, and more modern and efficient detention facilities. We urge the Committee to support the President’s proposed increase of \$11.5 million for public safety and justice.

Standing Rock is a large, rural Reservation in North and South Dakota, covering 2.3 million acres. The Reservation’s population – about 8,500 Tribal members and 2,000 non-members – resides in eight widely scattered communities. Law enforcement staffing is simply inadequate to address the situation. And even among the law enforcement positions that are authorized on our Reservation, more than half of the positions are vacant – a result of our isolated location and the lack of adequate housing. As matters stand, there are typically only 4 officers on duty per shift – and at times, this number is reduced to 2. These officers must cover the entire Reservation. Drive times are extensive – as it takes an hour or more to drive from one community to the next, even when the weather is good. The result is that response times can be lengthy, and it is all too often the case that by the time police arrive on the scene of an incident, the suspects have fled. And, given the lack of staff and the great distances involved, there is certainly no opportunity for law enforcement to work with local communities on crime prevention or community outreach. The kinds of community policing that are the foundation of safe communities and positive police-community relations are simply out of reach with the resources available.

While law enforcement officers and staff do their best, we still have rising crime patterns on the Reservation. Uniform Crime Reporting data from the BIA shows an alarming trend regarding crime – aggravated assault, burglary, motor vehicle theft and forcible or attempted rape have all shown significant increases over the three most recent years for which data is available. There are significant drug and alcohol problems on the Reservation, and the vast majority of crime we face is associated with substance abuse. We need to address these problems with more effective law enforcement, but also with substance abuse treatment programs, community healing resources, and a Tribal judicial process that emphasizes the cultural importance of addressing these issues. All of this requires more robust funding.

Tribal courts also need additional resources. At Standing Rock, our Tribal Court cannot carry out all the required criminal proceedings, let alone civil cases, with the small allocation of funds we receive from the BIA. The result is that the Tribe has been forced to heavily subsidize our Tribal Court with Tribal funds that are so desperately needed to address social programs and the ill effects of poverty suffered by our people. This is not a choice we should be forced to make. The President’s budget includes additional funding under the Tiwahi Initiative to address alternatives to incarceration and Tribal Family Courts. We urge the Committee’s support.

**Health care.** In addition to public safety, our youth need proper health care to thrive. Many of our youth suffer from behavioral problems that result from the poverty and other adverse conditions they find in their communities. In the most extreme cases, this can lead to the ultimate tragedy of youth suicide – something that is all too prevalent in our communities and that must be addressed in a more comprehensive and culturally appropriate way. The President’s budget calls for the IHS and SAMSHA to work together on a Tribal Behavioral Health Initiative for Native Youth. This important initiative would expand a Methamphetamine and Suicide Prevention Initiative, which has proven effect where it has been implemented. We urge the Committee to support full funding (a \$25 million increase) for this initiative. Providing these services more broadly throughout Indian country would be a compassionate and wise investment in the future of our youth.

We also urge the Committee to support the proposed increase of \$70 million in Purchased/Referred Care. At Standing Rock, the types of health care that can be provided on the Reservation in our clinics are limited – and most health care must be secured off the Reservation. Each year, many of our Tribal members are forced to go without needed health care services because Purchased/Referred Care funds are depleted before the fiscal year ends. Whether our Tribal members receive the health services they so desperately need should not depend upon the time of year when those services are needed.

**Contract Support Costs.** We strongly support the President’s proposal to establish a mandatory appropriation for the payment of contract support costs. These are funds that are promised to tribes in exercising self-determination, and they should no longer be the subject of annual shortfalls, appropriations struggles or litigation. Establishing a mandatory appropriation would alleviate a longstanding problem and assure fair treatment of the tribes.

Thank you to the Committee for your work in addressing the needs of Indian country.