

**Testimony of Victor Joseph, President and Chairman  
Tanana Chiefs Conference**

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

**Hearing on the Fiscal Year 2016 Budget  
March 25, 2015**

It is a pleasure to be back to share the Tanana Chiefs Conference's (TCC) priorities with this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to be here.

TCC is a non-profit intertribal consortium of 39 federally recognized Tribes located across Alaska's vast interior. TCC serves approximately 13,000 Native American people in Fairbanks and the surrounding rural villages. Our traditional territory and current service area occupy a mostly roadless region that is nearly the size of Texas. It stretches from Fairbanks clear up to the Brooks Range and over to the Canadian border.

Remoteness poses many challenges, but I can assure you TCC meets those challenges every day. When I testified last year, I had just recently been elected President of TCC. The more I understand every aspect of TCC's work, the more I am impressed with what TCC accomplishes every day. Recently, our full Board of Directors met to develop a new 5-year strategic plan. In the coming years, our highest priorities will include substantially expanding medical care and public safety services, a new emphasis on wellness and prevention, oversight of fish and game management, ensuring responsible economic development, and increasing employment in the villages. We welcome Congress's partnership to help us achieve these goals.

**CONTRACT SUPPORT COSTS**

It has long been known that TCC provides far better services to our communities than the BIA or IHS ever could. Consequently, TCC contracts programs from both the BIA and IHS. Our ability to maximize the results of our self-governance and run robust programs depends on our receiving full contract support costs (CSC) to support these programs.

In the past couple of years, significant strides have been made in this area, and thanks in large part to this Committee we are now in an era of full funding. We were delighted that the President's budget estimate for CSC is a very good one. An accurate projection will help ensure that neither the BIA nor IHS feel compelled to redirect program funding to pay for CSC. An accurate CSC estimate is the best way to avoid the unfortunate reprogramming actions which occurred last year.

We are very encouraged by the President's proposal to make CSC mandatory, though we are disappointed that the request is only for three years. CSC funding should be a permanent mandatory appropriation. These funds must be added to any contracted program dollars, and making it a permanent mandatory appropriation will end all future efforts by either Agency to avoid funding these required costs. Litigation will be over and certainty will be the order of the day. Such a scheme will allow TCC and the BIA and IHS to focus on the important work of providing health care services, public safety services, and the myriad of other services we provide in our communities. We therefore hope that the Committee Members will support a permanent mandatory appropriation for CSC.

Finally, we ask that the Committee direct IHS to finalize CSC payments within 60 days of the close of the contract year. IHS recently developed a scheme to continue reconciling CSC payments for up to five years. This ridiculous plan is not only unnecessary; it will also divert scarce resources away from service delivery. This will benefit neither IHS nor the tribal organizations, and we therefore ask that the Committee intervene to stop IHS from pursuing its current plan. All our other grants are closed out monthly; why should IHS and BIA compact funds be any different?

## **IHS BUDGET**

TCC was very pleased to see that the President's budget contains a 9% increase over 2015 enacted levels. These additional funds are vital to addressing the critical need for medical services for Native Alaskans and we hope the Committee is able to find the funds to meet these targets.

Similarly, TCC is happy to report that \$70 million of those increases are targeted to Purchased and Referred Care (PRC). These funds are used to buy health care when a tribal organization or IHS cannot provide the services. As we reported to you last year, the demand on PRC dollars has increased as health care costs, especially provider fees, have increased. The increase this year will provide \$44 million for inflation and \$25 million for program increases. These dollars will provide much needed relief to PRC programs across the country and especially for TCC.

But TCC was disappointed to see that the President's Budget contains no increase for the Domestic Violence and Prevention Initiative (DVPI). These funds support efforts to reduce the incidence of domestic violence, which affects Native Alaskan women at a much higher rate than other populations. The statistics are not new. The Indian Law and Order Commission's report made clear just how bad the situation was: Women in tribal villages and Native communities in Alaska report rates of domestic violence up to 10 times higher than in the rest of the United States. Physical assault victimizations rates are 12 times higher.

TCC is encouraged that the President requested additional funding to combat domestic violence in the Department of Justice's budget, but in order to adequately address domestic violence in Native communities, the DVPI program funds also need to be increased. We must do more to help victims of domestic violence, and we need Congress's help to do so. We request that you add funds to this very successfully and urgently needed program.

## **BIA BUDGET**

TCC was also pleased to see that the President's BIA budget is also higher than the enacted 2015 levels—12% higher in fact. This increase is desperately needed to address the effect of years of flat budgets. Again, we hope this Committee will be able to fund these increases.

Two of these increases came in programs that TCC highlighted last year as requiring additional funding: Probate in Trust and Rights Protection. Probate in Trust would receive a 7.3% increase, and this will help TCC keep the process of estate distribution flowing smoothly. This, in turn, is important for ensuring residents of our communities are able to use their land—whether for a home or other endeavors. This promotes self sufficiency in our communities. The Rights Protection program would receive a 13.3% increase. This program provides support to Tribes in defending their trust land (such as allotments) and other trust resources through legal actions. Like the Probate in Trust program, this program is integral to protecting our ability to use our land. Both of these programs are acutely in need of additional funds and we therefore urge the Committee to fund the requested increases.

TCC was disappointed to see that funding for the Environmental Quality line remains essentially flat. In fact, the .9% increase is not even enough to cover inflation and thus represents a decrease in the effectiveness of the current appropriation. As we reported to this Committee last year, these funds support archaeological investigation and approval that is required before any development is done on our lands. As such, these funds both help us develop our land resources responsibly while also making sure that our cultural resources are protected. The funding provided, however, is simply not enough to meet the demand for these services. We encourage the Committee to add funds to this program to help TCC responsibly develop our lands.

TCC has recently embarked on a coordinated campaign to protect its subsistence resources. These resources provide not only critical nutritional value to our communities but also are important elements of our culture and traditions. We were pleased to see that the President's budget includes \$40 million for Supporting Tribal Resilience in Indian Country. This program will allow Tribes and tribal organizations to prepare for climate changes, which will

impact our fish and wildlife services. Many of these impacts will hit Alaska especially hard, and we appreciate the additional funding to prepare for the challenges ahead. In particular, we appreciate the increase for the Tribal Management and Development Program, which allows Tribes and tribal organizations to manage their own fish and wildlife resources.

Finally, TCC remains committed to ensuring public safety in our communities. As the Indian Law and Order Commission's report made clear, there is a lot of work to be done to ensure public safety in Alaska's rural communities. Alaska is one of six states, called P.L. 280 states, in which jurisdiction over crimes in Native communities rests mainly with the States. The BIA doesn't have enough funding to go around and so it prioritizes funding public safety efforts in non P.L. 280 States on the assumption that P.L. 280 States are investing sufficiently in public safety and law enforcement in Native and rural communities. But this is simply not so. The Alaska Department of Public Safety, which has primary responsibility for providing law enforcement in rural Alaska, provides only 1.0 to 1.4 field officers for every one million acres. This means that at least 75 communities in Alaska lack any law enforcement presence at all. In most Alaska villages, the tribal courts are the only meaningful judicial voice for anything other than the most serious and violent of crimes.

The President's budget moves in the right direction by providing \$15 million in its Supporting Indian Families and Protecting Indian Country program. As part of this program, the President's budget requests \$4 million for Law Enforcement Special Initiatives and \$5 million for tribal courts. While this is a good first step, TCC encourages this Committee to substantially increase these amounts for Tribes in P.L. 280 States. In order to truly address the issue of public safety in Native communities, we must have additional resources.

## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION**

We also invite all Members to support the Tribal Behavioral Health Grant Program. This program is administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) and would provide funds to tribal organizations to reduce the shocking rates of substance abuse and suicide in their communities. According to the Indian Law and Order Commission's report, Alaska Natives experience suicide at four times the national average, and suffer the highest rates of alcohol abuse. The Tribal Behavioral Health Grant Program will provide desperately needed funds to combat these problems.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on behalf of TCC.