



Chairman Ken Calvert

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

**Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Oversight Hearing:
Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation
February 25, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

Good afternoon and welcome to this oversight hearing on the fiscal year 2017 budget for the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation.

The relocation program in Arizona impacts relatively few Americans, but to those it does impact, it does so in deeply personal ways. Being told to relocate from one's home, and to pull up one's own roots, can be devastating to a family and a community, no matter what incentives are offered to try and make the process easier. Perhaps that is why the Navajo and Hopi land dispute has been called the greatest land title problem in the West. And perhaps that is why the relocation program, which was created to solve the problem, and was expected to take five years and cost \$41 million, continues today, 40 years and \$586 million after its inception.

We are here today because this subcommittee has redoubled its efforts to succeed where so many good people before us have fallen short. In December, 2014, at this subcommittee's request, the Inspector General of the Department of the Interior published a report concluding that the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation cannot complete its work and cease operations in the near future without legislative changes and/or an increase in annual appropriations. The Inspector General further pointed out that increasing appropriations in the short term is a more cost-effective strategy than continuing with the status quo. The report recommended that this subcommittee consider alternatives and determine an approach that will best control costs, and complete the relocation mission, "in an acceptable, judicious, and timely manner."

In January, 2015, members of this subcommittee visited the Hopi Tribe and the Navajo Nation to see the challenge firsthand and to hear from those most directly affected about what has gone right, what has gone wrong, and where we should go from here. The message we heard was clear: "Don't leave until you finish the job."

In December 2015, this subcommittee more than doubled the relocation program's budget to \$15 million in FY16 in order to reduce the backlog of 96 certified applicants awaiting relocation, and to work through 200 additional known appeals.

Just this week, the Office of Inspector General released its second subcommittee-commissioned report, which looked into allegations made by relocated families, that homes and infrastructure are incomplete or in need of repair.

The law says that the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation shall cease to exist when the President determines that its functions have been fully discharged. In consultation with this subcommittee, the Agency has set a goal to complete its work so that the next President can be in a position to make such a determination by September 30, 2018, a little more than 2½ years from now.

The FY17 budget proposes a modest three percent increase to work with the Navajo Nation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other Federal departments and agencies to ensure that this program can be brought to an expeditious and fair end, and to ensure that any responsibilities remaining after the closure will be transferred to the appropriate Federal and Navajo entities.

Clearly, there is much to be done. And the devil is always in the details. Hopefully today's hearing will flesh out some of those details, and begin to put us on a path to completion as quickly as possible, but not a day faster than is needed to ensure that those most affected by the program have been treated fairly, honorably, and with dignity.

This is not a partisan issue. It is a human issue. It is a nation-to-nation issue. And it is an opportunity to make good on a commitment, to shake hands, and to let deep wounds begin to heal.

My former boss, the late President Ronald Reagan, once said, "No government ever voluntarily reduces itself in size. So, government's programs, once launched, never disappear. Actually, a government bureau is the nearest thing to eternal life we'll ever see on this earth." If he were alive today, he may have to make at least one exception.

I'm pleased to be joined today by my subcommittee colleagues, as well as the senior leadership team of the Office of Navajo and Hopi Indian Relocation: Executive Director Chris Bavasi, Chief Financial Officer Nancy Thomas, and Chief Counsel Larry Ruzow. Welcome. It is nice to see all three of you again. And thank you, once again, for your hospitality last year during the subcommittee's visit.

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