

**TESTIMONY OF LARRY WAWRONOWICZ, NATURAL RESOURCE DIRECTOR
LAC DU FLAMBEAU BAND OF LAKE SUPERIOR CHIPPEWA INDIANS
BEFORE THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
ON BIA, IHS & EPA PROGRAMS IN THE FY2017 BUDGET
MARCH 18, 2016**

My name is Larry Wawronowicz, I am the Natural Resource Director for the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, located in Wisconsin. I am not a tribal member, but I have worked for the Lac du Flambeau Band for 33 years, raised a family in the Lac du Flambeau community and have many friends and co-workers in Indian Country, so I am deeply honored that the Tribe has allowed me the privilege to present this testimony which reflects the needs and concerns of the Tribal membership.

The President's FY 2017 Budget has some important and positive initiatives for Tribes. For example, it includes fully funding contract support costs and requesting that Congress reclassify this funding as mandatory. And in doing so would implement what two Supreme Court cases have already stated is the law. This funding must be paid; it is time that Congress make the necessary changes in the statute to implement the Court's decisions.

I. GENERATION INDIGENOUS INITIATIVE

I call on you to fully support the Administration's emphasis on our youth. The Generation Indigenous Initiative is the first time this Nation has taken a comprehensive approach to improving the lives of Indian children. The Administration called on all agencies including those outside of the Department of the Interior and the Indian Health Service to do their part to fulfill the trust responsibility to Indian children. Based on the federal trust responsibility, the federal government should be committed to providing fundamental fairness to Tribes, not just in selected areas but across the board – and appropriations for all programs affecting Indians should provide funding levels based on this fundamental principle.

BIA Tiwahe (Family) Initiative. The Tribe strongly supports the continuation of the Administration's Tiwahe initiative, a broad-based, interdisciplinary, and culturally appropriate program for addressing the needs of Indian families and communities – including child welfare and family services, housing and job training. This program fills an immediate and critical need.

At Lac du Flambeau, over the last few years we have faced a crisis in our community arising from a growing epidemic of drug abuse. The problem has been far-reaching – as we find widespread abuse of prescription drugs, synthetic marijuana, and heroin on our Reservation. The impact on our community has been devastating in terms of the health and well-being of our families. The rise in drug abuse often leaves our children caught in unsafe situations at home. This has led to an increase in the need for foster care and other temporary placements for our children. The Administration's \$57 million request (a \$12.3 million increase) for tribal social service programs and the \$18.9 million request (a \$3.4 million increase) for Indian Child Welfare programs will help meet this need. In addition the \$30 million requested for tribal courts (\$2.5 million increase) will also ensure that our children are safer as these institutions will have

additional resources to supervise and monitor the children in their care. This is also why the Tribe supports the Administration's request for \$29 million to increase the number of mental health providers throughout the Indian Health Care System and the \$15 million increase to hire behavioral health professionals and peer specialists focused on Indian youth and their families. .

II. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

A. Natural Resource Programs. As we address our communities' social services needs, we are mindful that one of the cornerstones of a healthy community is a healthy environment. Clean air, water and land are vital for the physical and emotional health of our people, and provide both a foundation for our Tribal culture and the basis for economic opportunity on our Reservation. That is our obligation to future generations – to ensure that our lands, air and waters are adequately protected.

B. Bureau of Indian Affairs Climate Resiliency. The Tribe endorses the requested \$13 million to address the impact of the changing climate on our natural resources. Our community is reliant on our natural resources to survive. If people cannot fish the lakes we have been fishing since the beginning of time or hunt wild game because these resources are not there, who we are as a people will be forever changed.

C. Tribal Natural Resource Management and Development; Tribal Fish Hatchery Operations and Maintenance. Tribes are leaders in natural resource protection and BIA natural resource funding is essential to maintain our programs. Lac du Flambeau has a comprehensive Natural Resources Department and dedicated staff with considerable expertise in natural resource and land management. Among our many programs, the Tribe operates a fish hatchery that stocks many of our lakes. Along with our other natural resource programs, our fish production activities are essential to protect our natural resources and to foster economic activity on our Reservation. We support full funding fish hatchery operations and maintenance.

D. Circle of Flight: Wetlands Waterfowl Program. We urge the Subcommittee to continue to provide support for the BIA Circle of Flight Program. This program supports Tribal efforts throughout the Great Lakes Region to restore and preserve wetlands and waterfowl habitat within Tribal territories.

E. Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. The Tribe strongly supports the work of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission ("GLIFWC"). GLIFWC assists in protecting and implementing its treaty-guaranteed hunting, fishing and gathering rights. We urge the Subcommittee to fully support the programmatic funding for GLIFWC from both BIA and EPA. GLIFWC has played an invaluable role in providing science and sound management practices for our off-reservation resources. This role could not be filled by any other agency.

F. Education Programs Education remains a critical investment in the future of the tribes. The Johnson-O'Malley Program provides vital support for Indian students in public schools. We support the \$18.5 million requested for this Program. We must do more for our students in public schools. Likewise, we are proud to see an increasing number of our students attending and graduating from colleges and other post-secondary institutions. Thus, we support the increased funding for for scholarships and adult education within the BIE. The Tribe also

supports the Administration's proposed increase in BIA funding for fellowship and training opportunities for post graduate study.

G. Tribal Courts. We are concerned that the Administration has proposed an \$8 million cut in funding for tribal courts in P.L. 280 states like Wisconsin. Because of a BIA policy that chose not to fund tribal courts in P.L. 280 States for decades, our courts have lagged behind our sister tribes in the ability to meet the justice needs of our communities. Congress recognized this deficiency last year and provided \$10 million to address it. BIA essentially wants to halt this initiative before it even starts. With regard to the \$10 million provided in FY 2016, the BIA has not held any consultation on how this funding would be allocated and we understand may not do so and instead use this funding to build its own bureaucracy. We would urge the Committee to clarify with the BIA that the FY 2016 funding was intended to assist tribal courts in P.L. 280 states and not to build their own bureaucracy which hopefully will carry over to FY 2017 funding as well.

H. Transportation. Proper road maintenance on the Reservation is essential for the safety and health of our community, and for promoting economic opportunities. BIA Road Maintenance, nationally, is responsible for 29,700 miles of BIA owned road and 931 BIA owned bridges. The Administration request of \$27 million only funds 16% of the level of need for BIA road maintenance. For bridges it would fund 62% of the level of need. Thus, 84% of the roads in the BIA systems will continue to be at poor or and failing condition and almost 300 of the bridges in the BIA system will be at poor or failing condition. These are roads used by school buses, first responders and police officers. In any other community this would be unacceptable. We urge the Subcommittee to increase funding for the BIA road maintenance program by \$9 million. This level of funding would allow approximately 25% of the roads to be at fair or better condition.

I. Tribal Historic Preservation Offices. The Tribe supports the Administration's \$11.9 request (a \$2 million increase) for Tribal Historic Offices. This increase is a start to adequately fund tribal Historic Preservation Act compliance. While more Tribes have assumed the responsibility under the Historic Preservation Act, federal appropriations have not kept pace and this threatens Tribe's ability to do this important work.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

A. EPA Tribal General Assistance Program. The Tribe strongly supports the proposed \$96.4 request in the EPA Tribal General Assistance Program, known as "Tribal GAP." This program provides base environmental funding to assist Tribes in building their environmental capacity to assess environmental conditions, utilize available data and build their environmental programs to meet their local needs. This is a foundational program for Tribes to address the broad range of challenging circumstances we face regarding our Reservation environment. Importantly, the increase in funding this program is to implement Tribal environmental plans and to recruit and retain qualified environmental professionals in Indian country.

B. Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. The Tribe strongly supports funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. For the indigenous people of Wisconsin, the Great Lakes represent the lifeblood of our culture and the foundation of our economies. The protection and

preservation of the Great Lakes are necessary to preserve the tribal communities that have made the Great Lakes area their home since time immemorial.

C. Leaking Underground Storage Tank. D. Leaking Underground Storage Tank. The Tribe urges the Committee to increase funding for Leaking Underground Storage Tank (LUST) clean-up in Indian Country. This funding was decreased to \$1.69 million from almost \$2.5 million a few years ago. As the EPA notes in its budget justification this funding is the primary source of funding for these clean-up activities in Indian Country. Since its inception in the 1980s, the LUST program has cleaned up 78% of the 1,375 identified releases in Indian Country. There are 298 of these identified sites that still need to be cleaned up. Unfortunately, the number of sites the EPA is able to cleanup has decreased by 50% in the last six years. While some of this is attributed to the fact the sites are much more complex and require more time and resources, there can be no doubt that this drastic reduction in the number of sites addressed is attributed to the decrease in funding.

This issue is particularly important to Lac du Flambeau because we fear that the 1,375 identified sites grossly underestimate the number of sites actually in Indian Country. In Lac du Flambeau we have 25 sites that may be impacting reservation resources which are not included in the 1,375 sites. One site in particular, the Haskell Lake/Tower Standard Site has the Tribe very concerned because of contaminated ground and possibly lake surface water with lead, benzene and a host of other contaminants. We identified this site in 2010 and we are still working on getting the funding necessary for cleanup. So we urge Congress to increase funding for the LUST program in Indian Country by \$5 million, recognizing that this will only clean-up approximately 33 out of the 298 identified sites per year.

IV. INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE PROGRAMS

We fully support the Administration's request of \$ 5.1 billion for the Indian Health Service. According to the IHS, this level of funding would fully fund pay costs, inflation, and partially fund population growth. This increase will allow for a significant investment in Purchased and Referred Care with a \$48.1 million increase.

Research has clearly demonstrated that our overall health is tied to our oral health. The Lac du Flambeau Tribe recognized this and that is why in 2013 we opened a state of the art dental clinic to serve the needs of our people. No longer are dental visits done by an occasional dental visit at our schools. We are now seeing our members in our facility early and often and are preventing dental disease before it can happen. We fully support the requested \$8.5 million increase for the dental health services program. This increase will address the not only medical inflation, but also the population increase our community has experienced.