

Congressman Jason Chaffetz

FY18 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Testimony

Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum, I thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. As you begin your work on the fiscal year 2018 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, I hope that the committee will consider a few the priorities that are pressing in my home district and state.

Indian School Bus Routes

Last year, dirt school bus routes proved impassable on multiple occasions causing Navajo students to miss eleven school days. Navajo parents and educators believe these absences contribute to the 40 percent dropout rate among Navajo children.

For nearly 30 years a county in my district, San Juan, has received \$85,000 per year from BIA to maintain 258 miles of school bus routes. Since 2005, San Juan County has spent over \$11 million of their own funds to maintain these roads on the Navajo Nation. This expenditure is bankrupting the county. The federal government needs to step up and fund road maintenance on Indian reservations.

I urge the committee to dedicate funding to maintain dirt school bus routes to ensure Native American children can get to school.

Bears Ears National Monument

On December 28, 2016, President Obama created the 1.35 million-acre Bears Ears National Monument in San Juan County, Utah. The Bears Ears National Monument was created over protest from the entire federal delegation and without the consent of the local population.

The Bears Ears National Monument is uniquely offensive as no elected official representing San Juan County supported the creation of Bears Ears: Utah's Governor Gary Herbert, Utah's State Representatives, and San Juan County's three commissioners all opposed President Obama's unilateral designation of a monument and support its rescission.

We, along with state and local officials, and the residents of San Juan County, are committed to ensuring that the Bears Ears region is protected and productive. We firmly believe that these decisions are best made locally, not by lame duck presidents. Therefore, I am asking that the committee not fund the Bears Ears as a National Monument.

PILT

Nearly 1,900 counties across 49 states face the expiration of critical financial offsets for tax-exempt federal lands under their jurisdiction. Still recovering from the recent economic downturn, these counties depend on PILT payments owed to them by the federal government to keep their communities afloat.

PILT dollars allow local governments to provide critical health, education, cultural and emergency services to their residents and federal lands visitors. Failing to act to fulfill this long-standing obligation will leave counties across 49 states vulnerable and without the resources they need to serve and protect their citizens.