

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

**TESTIMONY OF DR. TONI TSATOKE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
KIOWA TRIBAL EDUCATION AGENCY
FY 2024 FUNDING FOR BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS, INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE,
AND BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION**

March 9, 2023

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Esteemed Members of the Committee:

My name is Toni Tsatoke and I am the Executive Director of the Kiowa Tribal Education Agency (KTEA) speaking on behalf of Mr. Lawrence SpottedBird, Chairman of the Kiowa Tribe, to address the critical issue of adequate resources to support tribal Nations in their pursuit of quality education and improved health care for their tribal citizens. I want to thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of our Chairman, who was unable to participate in person because of pressing urgent issues back home.

I am speaking before this body today as a living example of the guidance and influence of our tribal colleges to help shape the lives of our young Indigenous students to prepare them to assume leadership roles within our tribal governmental systems. I attended Haskell Indian Nations University and graduated with a degree in Education in 2002 after having experienced childhood in the small rural community of Carnegie, OK, home to the Kiowa Tribe. My rural school education may not have prepared me for the rigors of higher education but my life among our broader community instilled the core values of our Kiowa people: to be strong, to be persistent, to work hard, and to be resilient. After receiving my terminal degree from the University of Oklahoma, with the assistance of the Kiowa Tribe's Bureau of Indian Education Higher Education program, I was prepared to make my way in this world fully equipped to confront the educational challenges of our people. So I present this oral testimony before you this morning validating the wonderful opportunity given to our Native students with the resources provided through the Bureau of Indian Education to be the best that we can be.

BUREAU OF INDIAN EDUCATION FUNDING

Tribes throughout Indian Country have made tremendous improvement in supporting educational opportunities for their tribal citizens because of the emergence of gaming resources which supplement the support provided directly by the Bureau of Indian Education scholarship program. This financial support is derived from the recognition tribal leadership provided to the pursuit of education among its youngest citizens when negotiating relinquishment of tribal land bases through the process of treaty-making in the early years of colonization. Our Kiowa chiefs and representatives negotiated these important conditions in the landmark Medicine Lodge Treaty of 1867 which required the provision of schools among

the tribes and have been a critical element of these treaties and compacts ever since. Our Kiowa leaders realized the importance of education for our youngest citizens that continues to remain at the forefront in our government to government relations to this day. The BIE Scholarship Program is pivotal to the educational journey of our Kiowa people and needs more funding to build on its success in providing access to higher education. We realize the essential mission of this program can make a real difference in the lives of our Kiowa citizens. We realize the practical financial support this program provides can be the life support necessary to sustain the educational journey of the best and brightest our Tribe has to offer. We realize the urgency of need this program provides can help to alleviate the burden of struggling to survive in an uncaring, unsympathetic world. Therefore, we urge full support of this Committee to increase funding for the Bureau of Indian Education in FY 24.

TRIBAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENTS

The functions of a Tribal Education Department (TED) are critical in the educational journey of its youngest citizens to support the development of a solid foundation from which students may grow and thrive in the realm of education. The role of TEDs is to assist individual students, local education agencies, state education agencies, and parents in navigating critical issues related to educational success and academic achievement. The ability to perform at a high level in support of these groups depends on the TEDs' ability to obtain necessary resources from which to navigate challenges and barriers in order to adequately address these critical issues including high absenteeism, low academic performance, lack of parental involvement, low graduation rates, and lack of choice in college and/or career pathways. TEDs need to develop seamless, comprehensive programs designed to overcome these barriers to success which address specific issues related to academic achievement. The Kiowa Tribe is in the process of aligning a variety of educational programs and services which will promote effective, efficient administration through the Kiowa Education Agency. But the success of such a monumental redesign requires resources and support to embed sustainable elements into the TED that will give a solid foundation to the Agency to better serve its tribal citizens. Therefore, the Kiowa Tribe urges full support and increased funding of the Section 2020 grants in order to provide adequate funding for tribes in need of expanding their capacity to improve their TEDs and their effectiveness.

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

The success of Kiowa citizens in the realm of education is dependent upon the quality of health care they are provided to maintain wellness. It is with that in mind that I testify in support of increased funding for Indian Health Services to adequately address the myriad of health issues faced by even our youngest citizens as well as the hope of the Kiowa Tribe leadership to one day be able to contract for the health care of its own citizens under the concept of Self-Governance. We know that resources are strained in regard to health care because of intrusion of COVID-19 and subsequent Variants that have critically impacted our Kiowa community. We have lost hundreds of citizens to this epidemic and are continuing to feel the residual impact of the disease as our people continue to struggle with recovery. We are uniquely impacted with

the loss of our knowledge keepers and cultural treasures whom are irreplaceable and beyond value to our community. It is imperative that resources are made available to address ongoing health related issues among our young citizens in order to undergird their wellness, which also enables them to be successful in the realm of education. We urge Congress to adequately fund the Indian Health Service in order to provide quality health care, wellness programs and services for our youngest citizens to fulfill promises made generations ago.

I want to extend my appreciation to Subcommittee for allowing me this opportunity to provide testimony in support of funding for programs that are so critically important to Indian Country. I am especially thankful that my Kiowa Tribe continues to allow me the opportunity to speak to these issues so critical to the well being of our people! Aho!