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**STANDING ROCK SIOUX TRIBE
TESTIMONY ON FISCAL YEAR 2026 APPROPRIATIONS
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES
FEBRUARY 25, 2025**

Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Members of the Appropriations Subcommittee for Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 priorities of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. My name is Janet Alkire, and I serve as the Chairwoman of the Tribe. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is a large land base treaty tribe. Our infrastructure needs stretch across our 2.3 million acre Standing Rock Indian Reservation. We have more than 16,000 enrolled members, and over half live on the Reservation. Our Reservation is about the size of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. However, we lack the basic infrastructure, funding, and authority that every government needs to provide for its communities and promote economic opportunities.

After decades of chronic underfunding, we lack the law enforcement, healthcare, education, housing, and social services staff and resources that the United States committed to providing in treaties with our Tribe. We paid for these programs and services through the vast lands and resources that we ceded in treaties and agreements. It is time for the United States Congress to live up to its treaty and trust responsibilities and provide the funding we need for basic services on our Reservation.

OMB Funding Freeze and Layoffs of BIA and IHS Staff

Fully funding the United States' treaty and trust responsibilities should not be subject to changes in politics. The current Administration cannot unilaterally freeze funding for the programs and services that the United States agreed to provide us in treaties and agreements. The Administration also cannot unilaterally lay off the staff that provide critical services to our

members and communities. These actions violate the United States' trust and treaty obligations to the Tribe.

At a minimum, the Administration is required to engage in tribal consultation on any proposed actions that affect tribal interests. Through tribal consultation, we could develop proposals for real reform and efficiencies needed at the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Health Service (IHS). However, unilateral actions will not work and violates the United States' treaty and trust responsibilities. We are already underfunded and have longstanding challenges hiring and retaining staff. Losing just one federal employee can grind our government services to a halt or threaten health care delivery.

Congress must pass the laws and funding needed to protect tribes from unilateral actions by any administration. Funding to fulfill the United States treaty and trust responsibilities to Indian tribes should be mandatory funding. Treaty programs and services cannot be subject to politics.

Funding for a Medical Campus

Our IHS hospital was built in 1962 more than 60 years ago. Our hospital is the oldest facility in the Great Plains Region. This facility is 34,000 square feet and cannot support the health care needs of our community. It has long needed replacement, is functionally inadequate, and needs significant repairs to remain in compliance with applicable codes and health care delivery standards. In addition, we have just one outpatient clinic on our large Reservation. Our two healthcare facilities lack the staff, equipment, ambulance service, and helicopter landing pad needed to provide lifesaving healthcare.

Recently, we were forced to use our limited funds to purchase a CT Scan machine for the IHS hospital. Purchasing a CT Scan machine was a significant expense, but finding space in our crowded hospital was even more challenging. Our healthcare buildings primarily consist of used modulars passed down from other IHS service units. Neither our twelve-bed hospital nor our outpatient clinic have a lifesaving ventilator or an ultrasound machine. In addition, the boiler heating system in our hospital is so old that in most winters we have trouble keeping the building warm.

Despite our critical need for investments in healthcare infrastructure, we were not included on the IHS FY 2022 Annual Facilities Planning Five-Year Plan. All of the facilities prioritized for construction are located in the Southwest Region. Given the state of our healthcare facilities, it makes no sense that our Standing Rock Service Unit is not on the IHS priority list. To meet the needs of our service area, a proposed architectural plan has estimated a new health care facility would:

- Consist of approximately 187,116 square feet in total size, an increase of approximately 153,116 square feet and which does not include additional staff quarters that are needed;
- Increase the number of exam rooms from nine to sixty four;
- Increase staffing levels to approximately 400 employees which includes 265 additional FTEs; and
- Cost approximately \$110,000,000 with adjustments for inflation.

Under current conditions, many preventable diseases are untreated and result in life threatening situations. When lifesaving healthcare is needed, we should not have to send our members more than an hour away over country roads for treatment in Bismarck, North Dakota. We need to be able to provide healthcare to our members, elders, and others right here at home.

Substantial Increases in Law Enforcement Funding Needed

Our members do not feel safe in their own communities. Crime continues to increase on our Reservation while we struggle to maintain quality law enforcement. Our police force is understaffed, and overworked, and our court system lacks adequate funding and detention facility space. We need immediate federal funding to address unmet needs and avoid a public safety crisis.

We ask that Congress fund the creation of a new BIA Law Enforcement Training Academy in the Great Plains to address staffing shortages. We rarely have more than one officer on duty at any time, and our officers often must work in dangerous situations without adequate backup. Currently, our officers operate on two twelve-hour shifts scheduled seven days per week, resulting in only one or two officers covering a particular shift. In order to address these shortages, we need to train and recruit officers in the Great Plains.

The most significant challenge is providing around-the-clock police coverage in all eight of our Districts. The Tribe only has three (3) supervising officers and seven (7) patrol officers patrolling an area the size of two small states and serving a community of more than 12,000 tribal members and residents. To be fully staffed, we need 20 more officers. Sometimes, the response time on our Reservation can take up to an hour, and sometimes an officer is not available to respond at all. The current system is taking a toll on our communities as well as our officers. Our officers are exhausted and feel unappreciated, which ultimately leads to burn-out, poor morale, and high turnover, exacerbating the problem further.

In addition, because there is a lack of housing, most of our officers reside in Bismarck, North Dakota, which is 70 miles from our Reservation. Congress should provide funding to house law enforcement officers within our communities. Providing for housing on our Reservation would reduce response time and build positive relationships between the officers and the communities they serve.

We are also forced to subsidize our Tribal Court system. The main courthouse, which is located in the same dilapidated building as our detention center, outgrew its ability to meet our needs years ago. The lack of space severely limits our ability to handle the tribal court caseload of 2,000 to 3,000 cases per year.

The same is true for our detention center. BIA Office of Justice Services (BIA-OJS) operates an outdated 48-bed male and female adult detention center on our Reservation. The center was built in the 1960s and has long outlived its utility. The population in the detention center is frequently two to three times above its rated capacity. To alleviate jail crowding, BIA-OJS

contracts space for long-term adult inmates in a facility that is a 772-mile round trip. Our Tribal Courts are also often forced to release prisoners to alleviate crowding.

We desperately need three to five times more funding for law enforcement to keep our communities safe. Without the investments in basic law enforcement infrastructure, we cannot provide the safe and secure communities that our members deserve, and that the United States committed to delivering in treaties and agreements with our Tribe.

Increase Funding for Reservation Roads

For large land-based tribes like ours, roads are critical infrastructure that require year-round maintenance. There are approximately 500 miles of BIA roads on our Reservation that need rehabilitation and replacement. Without adequate funding, our youth cannot get to school, we cannot support economic development, and our community risks dangerous road conditions that may result in deadly car accidents.

In 2019, we were devastated when long-standing and unfulfilled road maintenance led to the loss of life on our Reservation. After years on our priority list for BIA's Roads Maintenance Program, a 40-foot section of a BIA road collapsed from a washed-out culvert. This left a 70-foot drop to a creek below the road. This heavily traveled road is an important commuting route for workers on our Reservation, but the wash out was not visible in the dark morning hours. We lost a nurse who was on her way to work at our hospital and a U.S. Postal Worker. Two tribal members were also seriously injured when their vehicles plummeted into the creek.

Like other basic services, we are forced to supplement the road maintenance budget. Currently we appropriate \$500,000 annually to make up the lack of funding from BIA. We also do not have the funding to address rain, snow, and ice on BIA roads. Snow and ice removal can consume up to 65 percent of our annual budget each winter. The BIA uses a 5-point road grading system with 5 being the best. Each year, the Tribe does a report on the conditions of the road, and consistently all the roads are at a cumulative rating of 2.5 or below.

Funding Needed to Protect Paleontological Resources

Our Reservation is a hotspot for paleontological resources. When properly managed, these priceless specimens can provide an important educational and economic opportunity, including: STEM curriculum, a pay to dig program, paleontology survey services, and providing a repository for other tribes to share tribal perspectives on paleontology. Funding is needed for the Paleontological Resources Office within the BIA Division of Environmental and Cultural Resources Management to support tribal repositories, education, and economic opportunities.

Conclusion

We ask that the Subcommittee take bold action to address the chronic underfunding of basic infrastructure and services on our Reservation. Indian programs were secured by our ancestors in treaties with the United States and these commitments must be fulfilled. Thank you.