



## **Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma**

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### **IOWA TRIBE OF OKLAHOMA TESTIMONY ON FISCAL YEAR 2027 APPROPRIATIONS BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES MARCH 18, 2026**

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) 2027 priorities of the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma. My name is Jacob Keyes. I am the Chairman of the Tribe. We are the Bah-Kho-Je which means the “People of the Grey Snow.”

Our ancestors lived across what is now the State of Iowa and its surrounding states. In 1883, our Reservation was established in the Indian Territory in what would become the State of Oklahoma. Just seven years later, in 1890, our Reservation was subject to the United States failed allotment policies. Federal commissioners divided up our Tribal lands into 80-acre parcels for each Tribal Member, and the rest of our Reservation was opened for homesteading. During the 1891 Oklahoma land rush we lost more than 220,000 acres of our Reservation lands.

Today the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma is strong and growing. Our Reservation homelands are in a rural area between Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Oklahoma. We have over 950 Tribal Members and our Tribal government exercises its authority over an area including parts or all of Payne, Oklahoma, Lincoln, and Logan Counties. We are the largest employer in our rural area with 440 employees working in our Tribal Government and our Tribal Business Enterprises. We operate Police and Fire Departments, and enterprises including gaming and entertainment, a golf course, and a recreational vehicle park.

Our investment in our Tribal Community and surrounding area does not end there. We are building a new \$40 million healthcare facility that will include childcare and a justice center. We are also about one month away from opening a new \$200 million gaming and entertainment destination that will bring 400 new jobs to the poorest county in Oklahoma. The gaming revenues we earn will continue to fund re-investment in our Tribal and regional infrastructure.

One of our most important investments is the Grey Snow Eagle House which provides rehabilitation and long-term care for our winged relatives and is a leader in eagle conservation. The Eagle House is one of only a few Tribally operated aviaries across the United States. We have rehabilitated more than 150 bald and golden eagles and have released 55 eagles back into the wild. Through rehabilitation, education, research, and providing sanctuary to permanently injured eagles, we continue to preserve this culturally important species for future generations.

## **ONGOING IMPACTS FROM INDIAN AFFAIRS REDUCTIONS IN FORCE**

Despite our recent investments and success, we are working to overcome decades of chronic underfunding of Tribal programs and services. The United States must fulfill its Treaty and Trust Responsibilities by provide the funding promised and guaranteed to us in Treaties, Agreements, Executive Orders and Laws. We deeply appreciate this Subcommittee's efforts to maintain and increase funding for Tribal programs and services in FY 2026. The dramatic cuts proposed by the Administration for FY 2026 would have devastated our Treaty and Trust Relationship. The Subcommittee must continue to increase funding for Tribal programs and services in FY 2027.

One of our most pressing problems is a lack of Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Indian Health Service (IHS), Department of Education (ED) and other Indian Affairs staff needed to fulfill the basic responsibilities of the Federal government. Indian Affairs programs and services across the Federal government were gutted by Reductions in Force (RIF). The loss of BIA, BIE, IHS and ED staff impacts everything we do.

The Federal government's Indian Affairs programs and services do not have a workforce optimization problem or a need for ongoing reorganization of programs and services. Indian Affairs programs are inefficient because they have always lacked the staff, resources, expertise, and funding needed to support innovation, use of new technologies, and effective management. We need more resources, staff, and expertise so that BIA, BIE, IHS, ED and other agencies can finally fulfill the United States' Treaty and Trust Responsibilities.

Everyone supports streamlining and efficiency, but the Federal government has not worked with Tribes to improve its services. Instead, all we have seen are cuts. Indian Affairs is already understaffed. We cannot lose the employees needed to oversee, approve, and manage Tribal programs and services that are guaranteed in Treaties. The Subcommittee should prevent Interior, BIA, BIE, IHS, ED and other Indian Affairs agencies from using any FY 2027 funding to further reduce staff or consolidate Tribal programs and services.

## **SUPPORT FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES**

After surviving decades of broken promises and failed policies, the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma is using economic development to support and expand our governing infrastructure, protect our people, and provide critical services to our communities and many others in our rural area. We are making investments in healthcare, law enforcement and gaming entertainment that will help to support our Tribe as well as the surrounding communities for decades to come, but we cannot do this alone. We are bound by our government-to-government relationship with the United States and need more federal resources to support Tribal economic development.

A good example is BIA's Loan Guarantee Program. This small but mighty federal program provides Tribes and Tribal Members with access to investment capital to support economic development. With \$13 million in appropriations, the program supports and guarantees about \$200 million in funding for economic development. In FY 2026, the Administration targeted this program for elimination. The Administration stated that its FY 2026 budget proposal "eliminates

the Indian Guaranteed Loan program for Tribal business development because it is duplicative of several other programs....” That is not accurate and conflicts with our Trust Relationship.

The Subcommittee should expand and increase funding for the Loan Guarantee Program. Tribes and Tribal Members need more access to investment capital, not less. We are entrepreneurs and businesspeople that bring creative ideas to market. The economic development that the Loan Guarantee Program supports provides jobs and opportunities lacking on Indian reservations.

We also support the Small Business Administration including its Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and the 8(a) Program. We ask that Subcommittee Members reach out to the Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Subcommittee in support these vital programs for Indian tribes. CDFIs include Native CDFIs which provide critical economic infrastructure in Tribal communities which are often rural or remote. The 8(a) Program provides training and technical assistance that is not available anywhere else for Tribes to gain experience and expertise in federal contracting.

Attempting to eliminate Indian Affairs programs that support economic development because they are perceived as “duplicative” does not honor the United States’ Treaty and Trust Responsibilities. We need more pathways for economic opportunity, not less. Reducing or consolidating programs and services that support Tribal economic development would have the same impact as the Administration’s RIF. Indian Affairs programs are already underfunded and understaffed. Cutting any of these services has a deep impact on our communities.

### **SUPPORT FOR INDIAN HEALTH CARE FUNDING**

The United States has a Treaty and Trust Responsibility to provide healthcare services for the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma as well as every other tribe. These commitments date back to the earliest Treaties signed between Indian tribes and the fledgling United States. As set out in Article VI, Clause 2 of the United States Constitution, our Treaties are the Supreme Law of the Land. Under these Treaties we ceded vast lands and resources that allowed the United States to become a strong nation. We paid upfront for healthcare, and the United States must live up to its word.

Every time political leaders in D.C. cannot keep the Federal government open, Indian programs and services are threatened. We greatly appreciate the work of the Subcommittee to obtain “advance appropriations” for IHS to help buffer this impact. It is time to make IHS appropriations mandatory. Mandatory funding would ensure stable and predictable funding for healthcare facilities that serve Tribal Members. The healthcare commitments the United States made in Treaties and Agreements should not be subject to partisan politics. We also ask that the Subcommittee finally provide enough funding to meet the actual healthcare needs in our communities. IHS is funded significantly lower than other federal healthcare programs. Recent estimates say that IHS needs about \$76 billion to be fully funded.

As a result of the United States’ chronic underfunding of IHS the Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma, like many other tribes, have been forced to use our scarce resources to build and operate our own healthcare facilities. Tribal construction of healthcare facilities has almost become routine. This is a tragic failure of the United States. Tribal Members that cannot access healthcare, live with

treatable conditions, and have lowest lifespan in the United States. This is an outrage. In addition to overall funding, specific Indian healthcare programs should be improved:

**Indian Health Care Improvement Fund.** Funding is needed to reduce deficiencies and inequities in health resources at sites with the greatest need. This is expressed as low Level of Need Funded (LNF) scores. In FY 2018, IHS received \$72 million to provide distributions to sites having an LNF score below 34.84 percent. The Fund has not seen an increase since FY 2018.

Our Tribe was one of the sites that received a distribution. We used that funding to raise our LNF score to the 34.84 percent level. This is great example of how strategic use of appropriations can have real impacts on Tribal Member health. As a needs-based program, it should receive the funding needed to meet the needs of Indian tribes. The National Indian Health Board estimates that this program should be funded at \$4.3 billion to meet the need. The Fund should receive advanced appropriations, and we support utilizing the LNF methodology for funding IHS programs to ensure that the funding gets to those that need it most.

**Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders.** Increased demand has resulted in significant waiting lists and wait times of 3 to 6 months. To meet demand, we increased provider levels from one (1) in 2016 to seventeen (17). We did this without increases in funding from IHS.

**Medicare Outpatient All-Inclusive Rate.** Currently we cannot bill the full Medicare Outpatient All-Inclusive Rate for eligible services provided to Indian patients with Medicare coverage. This results in a financial penalty for Tribes that operate outpatient facilities under Self-Determination Contracts and Compacts that were not operated by a Tribe or the IHS as a qualified “provider-based facility” or a “grandfathered Tribal FQHC.”

**Processing of Contract Support Cost Claims.** We filed Contract Support Cost Claims with IHS for calendar year 2018 on December 30, 2024. For 2019 we filed on December 30, 2025. We have not yet been afforded the opportunity to negotiate the final claim amount for each year. When we agree to take over healthcare, IHS needs the staff to process our Contract Support Costs.

**The Rural Health Transformation Program Funding.** Enacted as a part of the One Big Beautiful Bill this fund included \$50 billion to modernize and strengthen rural healthcare. We are located in a rural area, and this critical funding should provide vital resources to rural Tribally operated health programs to modernize and strengthen healthcare in our communities. Many states provided set-asides to Tribes as part of their program to ensure Tribal programs in rural areas will receive this funding. However, the State of Oklahoma has not done this. The State’s failure to set-aside funding for rural Tribal communities seems to conflict with the intent of Congress.

## CONCLUSION

The Iowa Tribe of Oklahoma appreciates the effort of the Subcommittee to prevent drastic cuts to Indian Affairs programs and services. We are committed to working with the Federal government to maximize the benefit and opportunity provided through Indian Affairs programs and services. Based on this level of support and cooperation it is time for the United States to provide the funding needed to fulfill the United States’ Treaty and Trust Responsibilities.