



Chairman Tom Cole

*Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education, and Related Agencies
House Committee on Appropriations*

Oversight Hearing: Native American Issues

April 23, 2015

Opening Statement As Prepared

Good morning. It is my pleasure to welcome our witnesses today to the Subcommittee on Labor, HHS, and Education to discuss Native American issues. We are looking forward to hearing your testimonies.

The federal government's relationship with federally-recognized Indian tribes is guided by a trust responsibility to ensure the well-being of tribes and respect their status as sovereign nations. This trust responsibility is established in the Constitution, treaties, Executive Orders, and court decisions. The federal government is required to manage tribal lands and resources in a manner beneficial to tribes and Native people.

This trust responsibility is not limited to those programs that are specifically targeted to American Indians and Alaska Natives. Many of the largest agencies that serve American Indians, such as the Indian Health Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, are outside of this subcommittee's jurisdiction. However, there are many programs funded under our bill that impact American Indians and Alaska Natives, including those targeted to those populations as well as broader programs that are used by tribes and tribal organizations. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services makes funding available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to build capacity within the public health system to improve population health in tribal and non-tribal communities while the National Institutes of Health makes grant funding opportunities to study and improve the health of all Americans, including Native Americans. The Department of Education makes supplemental grants to local education agencies that serve a disproportionate number of Native students, and these school districts also receive IDEA funding to help provide services to students with disabilities, a group in which Native children are disproportionately represented. The Department of Labor has dedicated funding under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act for workforce education and training programs that are designed to meet the diverse needs and traditional cultural values of Native Americans.

Indian communities face extensive issues related to health, unemployment, poverty, and education. Heart disease is the leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives. The CDC has funded an atlas of Heart Disease and Stroke

Among American Indians and Alaska Natives to help health professionals tailor prevention programs to communities.

One-third of American Indian and Alaska Native children live in poverty. The high school graduate rate for Indian children is 67%, which is the lowest of any racial or ethnic group. Only 13% of American Indians and Alaska Natives have completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 29% in the population in general. Indian students are disproportionately suspended and expelled and are less likely to attend schools that offer challenging coursework that would help prepare them for higher education.

Many programs in our appropriations bill are designed to address these issues, but there are obstacles that prevent these programs from meeting the nation's trust responsibility to Native Americans.

Our goal for the hearing will be to define the challenges that exist for Native American tribes in working with the federal government and learn about how the government could better serve them and be a better partner.

Today, we look forward to hearing from our witnesses about their perspectives on these issues. I'd like to welcome--

Stacy A. Bohlen, a member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. She serves as the Executive Director of the National Indian Health Board (NIHB). With the support of a strong, tribally-elected Board of Directors, Ms. Bohlen's service to NIHB has contributed to the organization's successful work to establish and elevate the Tribal presence for improving health care in Congress, promoted and strengthened the organization's service to all federally recognized Tribes.

James Parrish currently serves as the Executive Director of Education for the Choctaw Nation and has been the Senior Director of the School of the Choctaw Language since 2009. He is an enrolled member of the Choctaw Nation and a native to southeastern Oklahoma. Mr. Parrish is a third generation educator who retired from public education in 2009 after a 34 year career in public education. He also presently serves as Chair of the Governor's Oklahoma Advisory Council on Indian Education.

W. Ron Allen is the Tribal Chairman and CEO of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. Mr. Allen is responsible for representing the Tribe as the elected leader and for addressing political and policy issues and/or positions at the national, state and local levels. As the Chief Executive Officer, he is also responsible for the executive administration of all the Tribe's programs including education, career development, social services, housing, health, economic development, natural resource management, and cultural affairs.

I look forward to hearing all of your testimonies.

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