

CONGRESSWOMAN BETTY MCCOLLUM  
Testimony on H.R. 1128, Indian Programs Advanced Appropriations Act  
Budget Committee Members Day  
210 Cannon  
February 27, 2020; 10:00 AM

Good afternoon,  
Chairman Yarmuth and Ranking Member Womack.

I want to thank you for providing this opportunity for Members to bring our legislative priorities before the Budget Committee today.

I'm here to speak with you today about H.R. 1128, the *Indian Programs Advanced Appropriations Act*.

As the Chair of the Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee, I have heard from tribal leaders for many years about the difficulty of operating essential government services under the uncertainty of continuing resolutions and shutdowns.

It was at the request of these tribal leaders that I introduced H.R. 1128 in the last session, in order to provide much needed stability to tribal governments and native communities.

Providing federal funds for Indian programs a full year in advance will ensure that our nation can better meet its commitment to uphold trust and treaty responsibilities throughout Indian Country.

This is an issue of pressing importance for all tribal nations, and one that I know has strong bipartisan support on this committee.

The 35-day government shutdown last year put a tragic spotlight on the clear need for advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service and for the Bureaus of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Indian Education (BIE).

Basic everyday needs like tribal justice services, health clinics, and social services for children, families, and seniors went unfunded, putting Native American communities at risk.

Access to insulin and physical therapy was compromised when clinics had to close or cut back services.

Emergency maintenance staff for tribal schools were unavailable. And roads went unplowed in the snow, impacting public safety.

The federal government has a legal and moral responsibility to ensure funding for our trust and treaty responsibilities is not interrupted by these delays in appropriations.

My bill, H.R. 1128, provides for advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service, the BIA and the BIE.

It would ensure that a future shutdown would not disrupt the critical funding these agencies provide.

Within the Interior Appropriations bill, we have already dedicated the resources over several years to achieve forward funding for some parts of the Bureau of Indian Education budget.

But we simply don't have the ability to forward fund all of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service budgets.

Each year, the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee holds two days of public witness hearings with tribal leaders to hear about the funding priorities for Indian Country.

This Congress, we have heard over and over again about the priority of advanced appropriations for tribal nations.

While government shutdowns are damaging to all of our communities, they disproportionately harm Native Americans.

We cannot allow the health and safety of tribal communities to be put at risk because the federal government can't finish its work.

That's why tribal governments and tribal organizations representing hundreds of individual nations support advance appropriations for Indian Country.

I would like to submit for the record letters and resolutions from the National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Health Board, Self-Governance Communication & Education Tribal Consortium, and other tribal governments and regional tribal organizations.

They all call on Congress to enact advance appropriations for our basic trust and treaty responsibilities.

Thankfully, this Committee already has a model to look to, where Congress provided advanced appropriations to better uphold its obligations.

In 2009, Congress overwhelmingly passed legislation to provide the Veterans Health Administration with advance appropriations.

In every budget resolution, the House now provides an exception allowing advance appropriations for the medical services and facilities funding provided for the VA.

We took that step to ensure our national commitment to care for our veterans was supported with a stable budget, even in uncertain political times.

Now we need to show the same commitment to upholding our essential trust and treaty obligations to tribal nations.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for the time.