

**Written Testimony of Kurt Riley
Governor, Pueblo of Acoma, New Mexico**

“Public Witness Testimony: FY 2019 Appropriations”

**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
April 30, 2018**

Recommendations:

1. BIA – Maintain \$1 million in dedicated funding for NAGPRA implementation.
2. BIA – Increase funding for tribal historic preservation efforts to protect tribal patrimony.
3. DOI – Increase funding for federal public lands conservation and management programs.
4. IHS – Provide full funding and advanced appropriations to the Indian Health Service.
5. IHS - \$71.292 increase in funding for Preventive Health programs.
6. BIA - \$650,000 to maintain BIA system roads within Acoma Pueblo.
7. BIA - \$30 million for Mesa Hill Bridge construction and maintenance.
8. BIA OTS – Increase support for irrigation infrastructure projects.
9. BIA, BIE - \$8 million to construct an innovative regional learning facility.
10. BIE – Increase funding for the Johnson O'Malley program.

I. Safeguarding Tribal Cultural Patrimony

Maintain the \$1 Million in Dedicated Funding for NAGPRA Implementation. Acoma was pleased to see that Congress maintained the \$1,000,000 in direct funding for Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) implementation in the FY 2019 Omnibus. This funding has supported the creation of a new FTE position committed to the protection of tribal patrimony, as well as Bureau-wide trainings on the law, its significant to tribal nations, and the harmful consequences that can ensue when it is violated. Funerary objects and items of tribal patrimony are not vestiges of history. They are timeless living vessels that carry the ceremonies and traditions of our people across the generations. Because of your support, the Federal Government is developing a new frame of mind in the way that it views and understands the importance of tribal patrimony. When aligned with other federal and tribal efforts – such as the PROTECT Patrimony Resolution – we can see a positive path forward in ensuring that the next generation will have access to these irreplaceable resources. **We strongly encourage Congress to maintain the \$1 million in dedicated funding for NAGPRA enforcement in FY 2019.**

Tribal Historic Preservation Offices (THPOs). Tribal sacred sites are not simply remnants of ancient civilizations. They are living testaments of our cultural heritage, marking the paths of our existence and shaping our worldviews from time immemorial to today. To an outside observer, the sites may look to be unassuming ruins or natural features. In most, if not all, situations the only way to identify these sacred sites, which may exist miles from our present villages, is through Native eyes. In recent years, an increasing number of tribal governments have established THPOs equivalent to state programs under the National Historic Preservation Act. Federal funding, however, has not kept up with the expansion of THPO programs and it is consequently difficult for tribal governments to meet their preservation compliance duties and responsibilities. **We urge Congress to continue its support for respectfully protecting tribal heritage through an increase in THPO funding for FY 2019.**

Cultural Landscapes and Federal Public Lands – An Irreplaceable Heritage. Acoma's religious, cultural, social, and ancestral identity is rooted inextricably in southwestern soil. Our heritage is passed down from generation to generation through the sacred slopes of Mount Taylor, the cliff formations of Bears Ears, and the petroglyphs of Chaco Canyon—among countless other sacred sites enriching the entire region. Any reductions in the federal protections accorded to these federal public lands per their status as National Monuments, National Forests, Wilderness Areas, or National Parks, among others, necessarily impacts our cultural and spiritual expression as Pueblo People. Federal agency budgets that do not account for the minimum costs to fulfill agency responsibilities impair the ability of these agencies to fulfill their trust obligations. **We, therefore, urge Congress to protect our irreplaceable natural and cultural heritage with increased funding for federal public lands conservation programs within the Department of Interior, including the NPS, USFS, USFWS, BIA, and BLM.**

II. Promoting the Health and Well-Being of Indian Country

Provide Full Funding and Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. Indian health programs continue to suffer from the effects of annual budget cuts due to sequestration under the Budget Control Act of 2011 (Pub. L. 112-25). Advance IHS appropriations would provide greater stability in healthcare services and facilities management. In the last decade, there has been only one fiscal year (FY 2006) in which the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill was timely enacted by the beginning of the fiscal year. Delays in funding ripple harmfully across the IHS and tribal healthcare providers, growing larger each year until a veritable tsunami of issues looms, including: uncertainty in service availability, burdened planning and management, impaired recruitment and retention, and stalled construction efforts, among many others. While Veterans Affairs receives advance appropriations that enable it to deliver consistent healthcare services, the IHS does not. **We urge Congress to protect Indian healthcare by fully funding advance appropriations for the IHS under the FY 2019 budget.**

Plan for the Future with Dedicated Funding for Preventative Health Services. The Acoma Health and Wellness Department provides basic healthcare services and health education programs to our tribal members. We depend on the IHS Acoma-Cañoncito-Laguna Indian Health Services Facility (ACL Hospital) for outpatient and emergency care. The quality and quantity of services offered by the ACL Hospital has declined in recent years, resulting in an adverse effect on the health status of the serviced Pueblo communities, which already suffer from high rates of diabetes, injuries, and other serious medical conditions. To turn the tide on these negative health outcomes, we believe that efforts must target existing conditions as well as prevent the development and progression of chronic illness. Increased federal funding for preventive healthcare is a cost-effective use of federal resources that reduces future incident rates of chronic illness and associated medical costs. **We recommend that Congress provide a \$71.292 million increase for IHS Preventive Health Services to keep our communities on the path to life-long health.**

III. Constructing Safe Tribal Communities

Connect Tribal Communities to Essential Services through Increased BIA Roads Construction and Maintenance Funding. Acoma has approximately 662 miles of roadways within our exterior boundaries, of which 363.8 miles are included on the BIA road inventory. Maintaining

the BIA roads costs the Pueblo almost \$650,000 annually. However, we received insufficient funding to cover these costs and are, thus, forced to use tribal funds to maintain federal roads. In FY 2017, for example, we received only \$300,000 in federal roads maintenance support, which translates into roughly \$981.87 per mile. These amounts are simply insufficient to maintain a safe and structurally sound transportation infrastructure. Adequate roadways are essential to our tribal economy, for access to governmental services, including emergency assistance, and to New Mexico's regional development. The cost of achieving this goal is relatively small and would benefit the entire region. **We recommend that Congress provide \$450,000 to maintain BIA roads within Acoma Pueblo to protect the health, safety, and welfare of our community.**

Connect the Acoma People to Safety with the Construction of the Mesa Hill Bridge. Acoma is bisected by a major transcontinental railway whose tracks are level with the existing roadway and marked by only minimal safety features. The flat terrain, lack of a fixed schedule for freight trains, and misjudgments on the speed and distance of trains all come together to pose a significant risk to motorists and pedestrians. Distressingly, there is no way to avoid the danger. Our hospitals and business centers are located on the north side of the tracks, while our community service facilities – such as Head Start, residential areas, and government buildings – are in the south. Our people must face the daily challenge of traversing the tracks to bring their children to school or attend medical appointments without the safety of an elevated crossing. Despite the clear threat to public safety posed by this situation, we have been repeatedly blocked from accessing the necessary funds to construct the Mesa Hill Bridge over the tracks. **We urge Congress to provide \$30 million under the BIA Tribal Transportation Program for the construction of the Mesa Hill Bridge at Acoma Pueblo.**

Support Sustainable Agriculture and Potable Waterways with Irrigation Infrastructure. Congress enacted the Pueblo Irrigation Infrastructure Act as Section 9106 of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009.¹ This Act directs the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the irrigation infrastructure of the Rio Grande Pueblos, including Acoma Pueblo. It also authorizes funding to address deficiencies identified by that study. The implementation of this Act will favorably impact Pueblo traditional lifestyle and culture, which has been based on agriculture and irrigated lands for hundreds of years. With funding through the Bureau of Reclamation, Acoma has surveyed all 44 miles of our irrigation infrastructure and identified specific maintenance and construction needs. **We urge Congress to increase support for BIA irrigation projects in FY 2019 to support critical irrigation projects in Indian Country.**

IV. Investing in the Future Through Education Services

Expand Rural Education by Investing in Local Innovation. Technological advances and the expansion of broadband connections are rapidly changing the educational landscape in rural communities. Acoma, however, continues to face significant challenges stemming, in part, from a woefully inadequate municipal infrastructure and limited economic and educational resources. These hurdles create tremendous challenges in advancing the short- and long-term welfare of our community. We seek to expand Acoma's horizons by developing a broadband infrastructure that will connect tribal members with previously unheard-of access to educational resources in their

¹ Congress has authorized an annual appropriation of \$6,000,000 for FYs 2010–2019 for the Secretary of the Interior, acting through the Commissioner of Reclamation, to provide irrigation infrastructure grants under the Act.

home communities. Rural education does not and should not mean limited opportunities for growth and development. **We, therefore, recommend that Congress provide \$8 million in BIE funding for the construction of a regional tele-education learning facility that would include a library, outdoor learning spaces, and state-of-the-art technology to provide Pueblo Country with life changing educational experiences.**

Honor Tribal Heritage with Increased Funding for the Johnson O'Malley Program (JOM). JOM provides supplementary educational services to meet the unique needs of Native children attending public schools. These services include academic counseling, dropout prevention assistance, Native language incorporation, and culturally based education activities in the classroom. The implementation of culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction and program design has proven to contribute to Native student resiliency and long-term success. To ensure that Native students are receiving appropriate forms of support, JOM authorizes parent committees to design and implement their own programs. Through this critical program we are able to better support our children as they reach for their educational goals. **We urge Congress to increase funding for JOM per student allocations to account for future student growth.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on these important considerations for the FY 2019 budget. We look forward to working with you, and we hope to have the opportunity to show you first-hand the magnificence of our lands as well as the challenges facing our community during a future visit to the Pueblo of Acoma. Dá'wá'éh; Thank you.