

**TESTIMONY OF
CHAIRMAN LESTER THOMPSON JR.
ON BEHALF OF
THE CROW CREEK SIOUX TRIBE
BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR,
ENVIRONMENT AND RELATED AGENCIES
THURSDAY, MAY 10, 2018**

Good afternoon Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Lester Thompson Jr., Chairman of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe located in Buffalo, Hughes, and Hyde counties on the east bank of the Missouri River in central South Dakota. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding issues of immediate importance to our Tribe.

FUNDING FOR LOCAL DIALYSIS CENTER

Native Americans face disproportionately higher rates of diabetes and its associated complications at almost twice the rate of the total U.S. adult population, and two out of three cases result in diabetic kidney disease. Members of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe have been particularly affected by this devastating disease. Close to 80% of our people are diabetic with many requiring dialysis treatments to survive. Currently, Indian Health Services does not provide any dialysis treatment centers in or near the Crow Creek reservation. Members are referred to surrounding areas in the state and must travel 60 miles one way, an unbelievable 120 miles roundtrip, to receive dialysis treatment. Dialysis patients are critically dependent on infrastructure for their survival, including transportation. However, many of our people are impoverished and do not have the transportation or the money to travel two to three times a week, to a center located 60 miles away to receive treatment that is critical to their survival. Further complicating the situation are difficult travel and extreme weather conditions making long distance travel nearly impossible, forcing many to go without treatment and resulting in diabetic and renal complications, loss of limbs, treatments of sores and cuts, and reduced life expectancy, placing an even bigger cost strain on Indian Health Services. We ask that the Committee provide sufficient funding for the construction of a Dialysis Health Care Facility to address this critical need.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND DETENTION CENTER

The Crow Creek Tribe suffers from multiple issues ranging from a lack of sufficient law enforcement coverage, a critical need for a detention center, and an inability to hold court as often as needed due to a lack of funding. Currently, we have three tribal officers that we are sharing with the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe across the river. The Crow Creek reservation alone spans approximately 422 square miles. Now officers must cover an even greater territory with the addition of the Lower Brule Tribe reservation as well. Covering both sides of the river puts an even greater strain on our law enforcement officers and their lack of presence has opened the doors for increased drug activity. Our law enforcement department is called upon to respond a number of problems including domestic disputes, property damage, theft, child neglect, medical

emergencies, threats of suicide, and traffic issues. With a reduced force in the field, oftentimes, we are forced to rely on only one officer to cover the entire territory causing a serious safety risk to the community. The problem has become so severe that we are now concerned people will begin to take the law into their own hands.

Further adding to this problem is the lack of a jail facility to hold arrested individuals. The nearest detention facility is located in Lower Brule. However, several major oversights in establishing the jail has caused significant and serious issues in detaining, transporting, and processing arrested individuals. Firstly, the facility was deemed a regional jail. Because it is deemed a regional jail, the facility must accept prisoners from all over the state as far as Standing Rock. This has overburdened the jail beyond capacity. Those arrested in Crow Creek must now be transported to other facilities across the state and even outside the state, as far as Oklahoma. Secondly, the jail was built to house both juveniles and adults. By law, there should be a division between juveniles and adults. However, the jails has only one booking station, one processing station, and only one recreation area, resulting in juveniles and adults comingling in all areas of the facility. Juveniles must now be deferred and transported to other jail facilities across the state and outside the state as well.

Additionally, our law enforcement is not even housed in a permanently constructed police station. Currently, a module trailer serves as the police station for our tribe. This is woefully inadequate in serving the needs of our law enforcement and the needs of our people. Lastly, the lack of funding for our court systems has left us unable to process detainees fast enough. We can only afford to hold court three times per week when we need to be holding court every day of the week to keep up with the demand.

BIE SCHOOL

The Crow Creek Tribe runs a K-12 campus with an elementary, middle, and high school with dormitories. It has become increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified teachers for our schools. The base salary at our schools is less than public schools with whom we compete for teachers. Public schools offer a bigger salary base, affordable health insurance, and retirement packages. Funds for the operation of our Tribal schools cover the costs of instructional programs, including salaries for teachers, teacher aides, administrative staff and other operational costs. It is of great importance to look out for the future of our children. However, constant changeover in staffing and a lack of qualified teachers willing to teach at the BIE schools diminishes the quality of education. If our children are to succeed, funding must be increased.

ROADS

An even greater frustration is that the BIA pours funding into and maintains the major arteries for the state but the auxiliary and local roads in the community have been left derelict. The BIA only appears to be concerned with how the state can also benefit and not with what the community needs. Increased Road Maintenance funding needs to be directed to the local roads in our community to improve road safety and protect the safety of our tribal members.

Due largely to inadequate BIA funding for repair and maintenance, our roads are in a state of serious disrepair. Local roads are not receiving funding for necessary repairs. Local roads are deteriorated, riddled with pot holes and many still remain dirt and gravel roads. Further exacerbated by snow and harsh winter conditions, an overwhelming number of local roads are unsafe and unfit. Roads left in this state of disrepair negatively affects the accessibility for emergency vehicles and law enforcement while negatively impacting the ability for tribal members to conduct day-to-day activities. We need roads that are accessible and safe to travel to ensure the safety and security of tribal citizens.

OPIOID CRISIS

The Crow Creek Sioux Tribe is facing critical health and public safety risks as a result of the opioid and methamphetamine abuse, affecting all facets of life on our reservation. Methamphetamine abuse has created a shortage of housing along with opioid abuse creating alarming levels of crime, juvenile delinquency, unemployment, and dependence on public assistance within our community. Without an on-reservation treatment facility and additional funding levels to address this horrible issue, our communities will continue to suffer. Funding is desperately needed for counseling, behavioral health, substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation services, and increased foster care for children of parents suffering from drug addiction.

The federal programs established and promised by Treaty to assist and support tribes are important to the livelihood of our people. We ask the government to honor its commitments and provide sufficient funding for these critically needed programs so that our people can build a strong community with sufficient law enforcement, accessible medical care, schools with qualified educators, and mental, behavioral health, and substance abuse treatment. Thank you for the opportunity to present these most immediate and critical needs of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe.