

**Written Testimony of Julian Bear Runner, President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe**  
**"Public Witness Testimony: Fiscal Year 2021 Appropriations"**  
**House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**February 12, 2020**

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**Recommendations:**

1. BIA – \$60 million for the BIA Road Maintenance Program.
2. BIA – \$15 million to establish a targeted BIA roads improvement program.
3. BIA OJS – Prioritize and expand opioid and drug crisis funding in Indian Country.
4. BIA – \$200 million increase for law enforcement and detention services.
5. BIA – Increase support for Welfare Assistance, Social Services, and the Tiwahe Initiative with dedicated funding in each of these categories for the Great Plains Area.
6. BIA – Increase funding for ICWA and child protection services.
7. BIA – \$23 million for the Housing Improvement Program.
8. IHS – Provide full funding and advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service.
9. IHS – Increase funding for IHS Facilities Construction and Maintenance with dedicated funding to address outstanding needs in the Great Plains Area.
10. IHS, EPA – Increase support for IHS Sanitation Facilities Construction and EPA Revolving Funds to complete the Mni Wiconi Project.

**Introduction.** Thank you Chairwoman McCollum, Ranking Member Joyce, and members of the Subcommittee for the opportunity to testify on FY 2021 funding recommendations for Tribal Government and Human Services programs under your jurisdiction. My name is Julian Bear Runner and I serve as the President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, a part of the Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires, known as the Great Sioux Nation). The chronic underfunding of Indian Country programs and treaty obligations over the years has taken an enormous toll on our Tribe and our members. The Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 cemented the United States' obligations to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, and we look to you to fulfill those obligations through the federal budget process.

We believe that two ways to do this are through reformation of the budget process so that Department of Interior funds are distributed based on demonstrated need and full funding of Tribal Priority Allocations (TPA) identified in Interior programs. Needs-based funding would more efficiently and effectively make use of federal resources, while also respecting the diverse needs of tribal nations. Together, needs-based funding and TPA make for a stronger and more responsive federal budget. In the spirit of advancing the welfare of my Tribe and other tribal nations, I offer the following budget recommendations for FY 2021.

**I. Tribal Government Sub-Activities**

Connect Communities to Essential Services through Increased BIA Roads Funding. Funding for the BIA Road Maintenance program has been under-resourced for several fiscal year cycles, despite the accumulation of over \$60 million in backlogged maintenance needs in the Great Plains Region and almost \$300 million nationwide. We are often forced to expend our limited tribal funds to cover the difference in roads maintenance needs—a financial strain that is compounded by the fact that efforts to control snow and ice our roadways can consume up to 50% of our annual budget each winter. Funding is so tight that routine bridge maintenance is not performed until it reaches a critical state. Consequently, our members must confront unsafe road

conditions every time they drive their children to school, commute to work, or try to access emergency services in Pine Ridge and nearby urban centers. This is unacceptable. The BIA should receive and distribute adequate funding to tribal nations so that we can maintain safe transportation networks in our communities.

Such dire circumstances require bold solutions. One bold solution is a drastic increase in the BIA Road Maintenance account so tribal nations, such as ours, can receive a funding amount that is actually viable to get the much needed maintenance work done adequately. Another solution is to create a new BIA roads maintenance account that targets backlogged road and bridge projects by taking mile inventory, remoteness, and weather conditions into consideration. An influx of funding for road construction, maintenance, and equipment would increase public safety, facilitate economic development, decrease costs, and alleviate the hardships our members currently endure. **We respectfully request Congress provide \$60 million for the BIA Road Maintenance program and an initial amount of \$15 million to establish a targeted BIA roads improvement program that accounts for a tribe's geographic size, location, and mile inventory.**

Maintain Funding and Expand the Scope of Dedicated Drug Crisis Funding in FY 2021. We appreciate the continued focus of Congress and federal agencies on addressing the burgeoning substance abuse crisis in America. On the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, we recently declared a State of Emergency due to the increasing rates of homicide and methamphetamine use on tribal lands. Such activities are antithetical to the Lakota way of life and balance of society. The deployment of federal funding and resources into Indian Country is urgently needed in FY 2021 and today. One of our most pressing needs is for on-Reservation drug treatment facilities. Our existing residential and outpatient treatment facilities, for example, are in desperate need of renovations to accommodate additional patients. We would also like to offer skills-based transitional living facilities to assist patients with their long-term recovery goals, but we lack the necessary resources for development and operations. The ability to provide comprehensive and culturally-appropriate care within our community would be life-changing for tribal members. **We, therefore, urge Congress maintain funding for the Tribal Opioid Response grants and expand the scope of the initiative to include other drugs, such as methamphetamines, that are causing immeasurable harm across Indian Country.**

Improve and Expand Security Infrastructure in Indian Country. Today, the Oglala Sioux Tribe is operating with less than 40% of the police officers that the BIA agrees are needed to provide adequate police coverage on our Reservation. Our limited officers respond to an average of 71,900 calls a year, of which around 18,500 are emergency calls to 911. Despite their best efforts, their response time remains around 30-40 minutes, which creates a dangerous situation for the victims of accidents and crime, and for our police officers.

The existing meth and opioids epidemic on Pine Ridge is an ever increasing problem has been next to impossible to address with our current staffing level. While, we appreciate the dedicated law enforcement opioids funding that was provided in previous fiscal years, we regret to inform you that after those funds are divided among the 190 existing law enforcement programs, our share of those funds will not even fund one additional officer at Pine Ridge. To reach the staffing levels required by the BIA's own needs assessment, our Tribe alone needs an increase of \$12 million in federal law enforcement funding.

Public safety facilities and housing construction programs have been critically needed for many years. When the BIA prepared to condemn our Medicine Root (Kyle) Detention facility in 2010, that building became the last emergency jail design that was funded by this Subcommittee. The facility remains unbuilt today due to a lack of resources. In the interim, we have prisoners and staff working in a below substandard building that fails to meet federal safety standards, all while the costs of construction continue to rise. This Subcommittee deemed the replacement of our Kyle facility to be an emergency in 2010, and that situation has only grown worse with time. Please help us put an end to this ever escalating problem appropriating the funding necessary to finally replace this building. We understand that carrying out the necessary construction activities will require innovative planning to strategically and quickly move this project forward. We stand ready to work with you and the BIA in realizing this long overdue goal. **In light of these pressing security infrastructure concerns, we strongly recommend that Congress provide an additional \$200 million for tribal law enforcement and detention services in FY 2021.**

## **II. Human Services Sub-Activities**

Maintaining Critical Social Services and Support for the Tiwahe Initiative. The unmet needs of our Reservation are alarming and well-documented. The average American can expect access to quality healthcare, childcare services, employment opportunities, and diverse recreational experiences. The average Oglala tribal member faces a much starker reality. We must contend with high rates of infant mortality, chronic illness, intergenerational trauma, limited to nonexistent economic development, and limited recreational outlets, among other factors. Social services operated by the Interior and BIA (along with other federal agencies outside of this Subcommittee's jurisdiction) are, therefore, essential to meeting our citizens' complex needs and promoting their personal development and well-being. Welfare Assistance, Social Services, and the Tiwahe Initiative provide an array of irreplaceable services to tribal communities. To strengthen the delivery of Social Services in Indian Country we recommend that Congress direct the BIA to develop a 5-year Strategic Plan pursuant to tribal consultation as a funding condition. **We recommend Congress increase support for Welfare Assistance, Social Services, and the Tiwahe Initiative in FY 2021. We also urge the Subcommittee to provide dedicated funding within these categories to address the staggering unmet needs in the Great Plains Area.**

Protecting Tribal Youth and Communities under ICWA. Our Child Protection Services (CPS) and ICWA program conduct integrated child and family services on our Reservation. Families form the bedrock of our community – transmitting our Oglala traditions and cultures across the generations and ensuring the future prosperity of our Tribe. Providing safe, nurturing home environments to both children and adults is one of the primary goals of all tribal nations. Our efforts to achieve this goal have been challenged by chronic underfunding, which limits our ability to deliver services, manage caseloads, and to recruit and retain qualified staff. Our CPS and ICWA programs cost almost \$600,000 annually to administer. Additionally, our Emergency Youth Shelter (EYS) Program is in desperate need of additional funding. EYS provides emergency shelter to youth age 12-17, which includes clean bedding, meals, toiletries as well as making health, vision and dental appointments, meeting with school personnel for school needs and cultural and entertainment activities. We currently have one Residential Care Provider, but need a minimum of four to effectively operate the program. We also need funding for building repairs, a program van, sufficient groceries and utility bills. **We ask Congress to increase funding for ICWA and child protection services. We also ask Congress to increase the BIA Social Services budget to address the needs of our EYS program.**

Support the BIA Housing Improvement Program Funding to Promote Homeownership. Our Reservation has a terrible housing shortage with an unmet need of 4,000 new housing units and 1,000 housing units repaired. Many of our citizens live in dilapidated, overcrowded, and often unsafe conditions that no American should have to endure. Chronic and even short-term exposure to these conditions affects the physical, social, and mental state of our people. HIP has played a central role in assisting families under 150% of the HHS Poverty Guidelines that live in substandard housing and have no other resource for housing assistance become homeowners. A stable living environment translates into improved family conditions, employment rates, and academic achievement. **We recommend that Congress provide \$23 million for HIP in FY 21.**

### **III. Healthcare – the Heart of Tribal Government and Human Services**

Provide Full Funding and Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. Providing for the health of our community lies at the very heart of Tribal Government and Human Services. Yet, in the Great Plains, this moral and legal responsibility is nearly impossible to carry through. Decades of underfunding and under-resourcing the IHS have contributed to a severe healthcare crisis in our community – residents of Oglala Lakota County, for example, have among the lowest life expectancies in America. Full advance appropriations for the IHS would promote greater stability in services, medical personnel recruitment and retention, and facilities management. It would also provide the IHS with parity to other federal healthcare agencies, such as Veterans Affairs, that have demonstrated success in delivering consistent medical services under advance appropriations that have otherwise been interrupted by budget-related complications like continuing resolutions. We are also pleased to see that Contract Support Costs have been fully funded under the FY 2020 omnibus, and we urge that support to continue going forward. **We urge Congress to fully fund IHS advance appropriations under the FY 2021 budget and beyond.**

Increase Funding for IHS Facilities Construction and Maintenance. Adequate and safe medical and treatment facilities are essential not just for patients and staff, but for instilling community trust and confidence in the services they receive. The Pine Ridge Hospital struggles with inadequate facilities and a burgeoning user population. The Hospital was designed to serve a user population of 22,000 but in fact serves almost double amount with an active user population of over 51,000. **We urgently recommend that Congress provide an additional increase in the IHS Facilities account for FY 2021 and we ask that funding within this account be directed to address the critical facilities needs of the Great Plains Region.**

Promote Access to Clean Water for Human Health through the Mni Wiconi Project. Our Tribe is the lead sponsor of the Mni Wiconi Project (Pub. L. 100-516, as amended), which provides potable water from the Missouri River to three reservations and the West River/Lyman-Jones Water District. Funding is needed to complete the necessary community systems upgrades on the Pine Ridge Reservation. We are working with several federal agencies to implement its plan to complete the upgrades. We need almost \$25 million to upgrade 19 existing systems and transfer them into the Mni Wiconi Project, as intended by the Act. Once transferred, they will be operated and maintained pursuant to authorized funding under the Mni Wiconi Project Act. **We recommend Congress increase funding for the IHS Sanitation Facilities Construction account and EPA Revolving Funds to bring this monumental project to completion.**