

**TESTIMONY OF HARRY A.  
ANTONIO, JR., GOVERNOR OF THE  
PUEBLO OF LAGUNA  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT AND  
RELATED AGENCIES  
FEBRUARY 26, 2025**

Good afternoon Chairman Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree and members of the Committee. My name is Harry A. Antonio, Jr., and I am the Governor of the Pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico. The traditional name of the Laguna people is *Kawaika*, meaning lake people. We are seriously threatened by a shrinking water supply.

The top legislative priority for Laguna is passage of the *Rio San José and Rio Jemez Water Settlements Act*. The Pueblos of Laguna and Acoma (Pueblos) once irrigated thousands of acres along the Rio San José, but over the last century streamflow has dropped by 90%, primarily due to junior upstream irrigation, industrial projects and municipalities. Though the Pueblos have the most senior water rights in the stream system, we engaged in negotiations with other water users so that our neighbors would not be left dry.

Instead of shutting off junior water users, our fund-based Settlement enables the Pueblos to develop alternative sources of water supply to sustain our people while protecting non-Indian water uses providing greater certainty for all Rio San José water users.

This Settlement will provide \$850 million for the Pueblos, with adjustments for inflation and market volatility. Costs for wet water solutions for us and our neighbors will only increase if this settlement is not passed by Congress. We have previously testified in both House and Senate Subcommittees, and the Settlement is poised for Congressional action.

In addition to our need for this life saving piece of legislation, the Pueblo receives funding from Bureau of Reclamation for irrigation and water management. Unfortunately, this funding is sporadic. To combat that irregularity, the Pueblo urges long-term reauthorization of the Rio Grande Pueblos Irrigation Infrastructure Improvement Act (“RGPIIA”), Section 9106(g)(2) of P.L. 111-11, Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, and an increase in funding authorized commensurate with needs identified in Reclamation’s report to Congress in 2017.

The Pueblo receives funding from many Interior agencies including: the National Park Service for Historic Preservation; the Bureau of Reclamation for water infrastructure and irrigation needs; the Environmental Protection Agency for environmental quality monitoring and management; the Bureau of Indian Education for schools and education; and, of course, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service for both direct services, and to fund federal responsibilities contracted under Public Law 93-638 – the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA).

Our funding requests, of course, are consistent with the long history of the United States’ trust responsibilities towards the Pueblo of Laguna and its citizens.

Although Laguna receives significant federal resources in the form of grants and contracts, continued funding of the agencies themselves is critical to the success of our operations. Agency staff continues to be necessary for technical support, reporting, and processing of grants and contracts. Existing staffing shortfalls and hiring challenges at Interior agencies have slowed the distribution of these funds, such that we frequently do not receive our contracted funds until the following fiscal year – the POL is currently awaiting the distribution of the majority of our FY 2024 funds.

The Pueblo is working as quickly as possible to move to self-determination compacts with the BIA, IHS, and other agencies. As we achieve the independence that compacting allows, our need for local federal agency staff will diminish. Support at the national level will continue to be critical to manage the flow of federal dollars in support of federal trust responsibilities.

Regardless of whether funding is direct funding or contractual, the amounts provided have long lagged inflation for almost all our programmatic needs. Inflation over the last decade is almost 36%, while the Pueblo's federal funding has increased an anemic 16%. This has resulted in an effective decrease in funding as salaries increase to match cost of living and the remaining funds for on-the-ground operations shrink precipitously. Examples of the impact are seen in the low ratio of officers to inmates in detention facilities; the low investment per acre in our wildlands; and the Pueblo's inability to pay wages sufficient to attract the skilled workforce necessary to accomplish critical tasks. Needs that are federal responsibilities must be met from scarce tribal resources

### **105(l) Funding**

One of the most important programs we've participated in over the last 5 years is the 105(l) Program, a reference to 25 U.S.C. §5324(l) of the Indian Self-Determination Education and Assistance Act (ISDEAA). This program funds leasing costs associated with the POL carrying out ISDEAA contracts. This funding provides us with the ability to pay for operation and maintenance costs on our properties used to carry out our federal contracts, as well as plan for the costs of replacement of these facilities.

Make no mistake, this funding is a lifeline. It is absolutely necessary to provide BIA and IHS contracting tribes with the ability to address day to day needs associated with their aging infrastructure, suffering from years of neglect, and the ability to replace outdated buildings using the reliable funds provided from this program.

We urge the Committee to make this funding mandatory, so that it continues to flow to tribes but does not impact the operation of programs.

### **Department of Interior Funding**

The National Park Service through the National Historic Preservation Act, provides Historic Preservation Funds to support a portion of the Pueblo's Tribal Historic Preservation Office, a

critical governmental office that separates the protection of tribal resources from state control and oversight that would infringe on Tribal sovereignty. More funding is needed to comply with the NHPA and meet the expanding costs for archaeological services and cultural consultations that it requires.

We urge the Committee to increase funding for Historic Preservation Funds program so that tribes have tools necessary to protect their historic and cultural resources.

### **Superfund and the EPA Pueblo General Assistance Fund**

Funding for the EPA is essential to maintain monitoring and management of our waters and air and remediate contamination from historic mining impacts, especially from the closed Jackpile Mine, once the world's largest open pit uranium mine and a critical component of the U.S. Cold War defense.

The EPA also provides funds to the Pueblos General Assistance Program – the basis for many tribes Environmental and Natural Resources efforts. This funding is essential for the protection of tribal water and air quality, waste management, and similar programs. Funding had stagnated for many years and recent increases need to be sustained.

EPA Clean Water Act funding (Sec. 106 and 319) for the Pueblo's Surface Water Monitoring Program is crucial to build and maintain identification, monitoring, and reduction of pollutants to ensure clean water throughout Laguna's surface waters.

We urge this Committee to retain funding that assists the Pueblo recover from the disastrous impacts of uranium mining on our lands.

### **Indian Health Service Programs**

*IHS Sanitation Deficiency System.* The IHS Sanitation Deficiency System (SDS) is an inventory of projects developed to address existing sanitation deficiencies in American Indian and Alaska Native communities and is the basis for prioritization of IHS funding for these sanitation projects. This listing and funding to address it remain a high priority for the Pueblo – our water supply is highly vulnerable to environmental fluctuations, and adequate wastewater treatment keep our people safe and healthy.

*Senior Care and Youth Education.* To ensure ongoing essential services across the lifespan of our tribal members, the Pueblo of Laguna is prioritizing the assessment, planning, design, and construction of a new early childhood development center and a tribal elder campus that would include a nursing home and adult day care, largely through funding from Interior, IHS and the Bureau of Indian Education. We are one of only two tribes in NM offering nursing home care to tribal and other rural elders. Replacing a 45-year-old nursing home with plans for new facility that factor in native elder population growth, cultural design aspects, seamless indoor/outdoor aesthetic and a traditional home feel. A new early childhood development center has become a priority to allow our children and elders to remain near their traditional homes and extended family systems where cultural assets and caring relationships contribute to a trusted care continuum.

*Health Care.* Health Care is one of the six key priorities for the Pueblo of Laguna, our local system has evolved into the overarching comprehensive, medical and public health, “cradle to grave” care system that our people need. IHS funding contracts maintain a solid foundation for this system, while our state-of-the-art outpatient medical clinic is sustained through third-party billing, especially Medicaid. We are greatly concerned by the freezing and unfreezing of government funded programs which cause interruptions to critical care services. Unstable health funding revenues will cause the system to painstakingly make decisions to continue or end critical care services.

*Special Diabetes Project for Indians (SDPI).* Diabetes is at epidemic proportions in tribal communities. The SDPI Grant has been re-authorized annually by Congress and presently serves approximately 780,000 American Indian people. In the long run, investing in diabetes treatment and prevention forestalls tremendous suffering and saves significant healthcare resources. Increased funding and long-term authorization for SDPI will make an important difference for Laguna and other Indian tribes.

### **Advance Appropriations**

Recent lapses in funding due to delays in Congressional authorization of annual appropriations are extremely detrimental to tribal health, education, and law enforcement operations. These core operations must continue whether there is federal funding or not. Laguna supports efforts to provide advanced appropriations for these programs, so our people and children do not suffer when the federal appropriations process breaks down.

Please retain existing advanced appropriations for the Indian Health Service and extend this funding to critical programs at the Department of Interior.

### **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to share some of our concerns with the subcommittee. Obviously, the Department of Interior, Environmental Protection Agency and related agencies are all critically important to Laguna, the other Native American Tribes, Nations, and Pueblos, and to Alaskan and Hawaiian Natives as well. Sustained funding for these programs is a key aspect of the federal governments trust responsibility to the tribes, and supports a vigorous, economically sustainable future for our people.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide our views on the Interior Appropriations FY 2026 budget.