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TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE DARRELL G. SEKI SR. CHAIRMAN, RED LAKE BAND OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS

Before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, & Related Agencies on the FY 2027 Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), Indian Health Service (IHS), and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Budgets
March 17, 2026

Chair Simpson, Vice Chair Maloy, Ranking Member Pingree, chi miigwetch (thank you) and the other distinguished Subcommittee members for this opportunity to testify on behalf of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians (Red Lake). Red Lake has 17,277 members, and an 840,000 acre Reservation held in trust by the United States. While diminished in size over time, our Reservation was never broken apart or allotted, and we are exempt from P.L. 83-280. Thus, we are responsible for a large area over which we exercise full governmental authority and control, in conjunction with the United States. Due to our remote location, there are few job opportunities available. While unemployment in Minnesota is 4%, ours remains close to 40%. The lack of good roads, communications, and other critical infrastructure impedes economic development and job creation. Federal appropriations are the primary way in which the United States fulfills its trust responsibility and honors its obligations to Tribes. And it is these appropriations that fund critical programs Red Lake uses to overcome the challenges of our region. As such, **Red Lake requests an additional \$58.5 million in FY 2027 funding for our programs as described in more detail below.**

Provide \$32.6 Billion for BIA and BIE in FY 2027. Tribes are very concerned about the Administration's ongoing proposals to implement massive spending cuts, including tribal programs. For FY 2026, the Administration had proposed overall cuts of about 35% for both BIA and BIE, and it purposely hid from their budget justifications, the line-by-line detail on what they were cutting, which left tribes and even Congress in the dark on where the cuts were. The scantily-detailed FY 2026 BIA budget justification Greenbook was not even released until December 2025, and Indian Affairs leadership refused to provide budget detail to tribal leaders at the Tribal Interior Budget Council (TIBC) meetings, claiming they have no control over the budget. Thankfully, you rejected the Administration's FY 2026 proposed cuts to BIA and BIE, and provided \$2.49 billion for BIA and \$1.36 billion for BIE. But the overall increase for BIA was only four-tenths of one percent above FY 2025, and for BIE and our Tribal Colleges, there was no increase at all. TIBC is the primary consultative body on Indian Affairs funding, and every year the TIBC prepares its budget recommendations for BIA and BIE to the Administration. The FY 2027 TIBC budget recommendations reflect actual cost data for 31 programs found in reports published by DOI or by collaborative development of cost data with the Indian Affairs – Office of Budget and Performance Management. The TIBC FY 2027 budget recommendation of \$32.6 billion for BIA and BIE represents the best available information on the funding needs of tribes, and therefore we

recommend Congress provide this amount.

Protect Tribal Programs from Across the Board Rescissions and Pay Cost Cuts. Since FY 2000 there have been 20, across-the-board rescissions to Tribal programs totaling 9.5% to provide support for natural disasters, among other things. While the needs of these rescissions have been met, the cuts continue to stay in place. And since FY 2013 we lost another 5% from sequestration. These cuts have greatly reduced our ability to serve our citizens. Worse yet, inflation since FY 2000 was 88%. Pay Costs are the only increase many Tribal programs receive but since FY 2000 Interior agencies lost more than \$4 billion from only partial funding of Pay Costs. Most alarmingly, Congress froze all Pay Costs in both FY 2024 and 2025, and it looks like FY 2026 Pay Costs were froze, or nearly so. The elimination of Pay Costs in just 2024 and 2025 have resulted in Red Lake losing about \$1 million in critically needed Pay Costs every year, providing nothing for cost of living pay adjustments for critical tribal staff, including our police officers and fire fighters. This Subcommittee has told all Administrations to request full Pay Cost funding in all budgets. We ask that you renew this call, and that you specifically ensure that full Pay Cost funding is included in FY 2027. **For Red Lake specifically, we ask for \$8 million to partially restore what we have lost since FY 2000.**

Fully Fund and Expand the Tiwahe Initiative. Red Lake was one of the first Tribes to successfully implement the Tiwahe Initiative established in 2015 to improve the health and wellbeing of families in Tribal communities by reducing poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, and associated outcomes, such as youth suicide. We are seeing great success. With no youth suicides reported in the last 5 years, our push to end youth suicide is a reality. Tiwahe has been critical for our Juvenile Wellness and Family Drug Courts, by providing funding to keep the courts staffed and functioning. Tiwahe Job Placement/Training funds have allowed us to offer training programs which directly create jobs and reduced reliance on TANF and other public assistance. Tiwahe enabled us to open and operate the Red Lake Children's Healing Center, a 24/7 youth residential treatment program providing vital mental health, substance abuse, and recidivism reduction services in a culturally sensitive way. Our Pathways to Wellness Recidivism Reduction program empowers our youth to embrace their culture and engage in community activities, resulting in significant reductions in youth recidivism. And, Tiwahe has benefitted our family reunification program, keeping more children out of foster care, with a 70% reduction in out-of-home placements in the last 7 years.

Red Lake is not alone in our success. Tiwahe's results are documented through various Congressional reports and hearings. Most recently, the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held a hearing on Justice and Safety for Native Children: Examining Title II of the Draft Native Children's Commission Implementation Act (NCCIA), which seeks to make Tiwahe permanent. During the hearing, Tribal leaders from Spirit Lake and Fort Belknap testified about the importance of Tiwahe and the successes Tiwahe has delivered to their communities.

Currently, Tiwahe Tribes are located in 14 states: Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Montana, Maine, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Arizona, North Dakota, South Dakota, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, and Wisconsin. As a result of your efforts to provide new funding in FY 2022 and FY 2023, four new Tiwahe demonstration sites were added (now 10 sites representing 65 tribes). In addition, BIA provided one-time funding in FY 2024 to each of 12 additional Tiwahe Incubator Tribes/consortia,

to assist them in developing Tiwahe implementation plans, so that they will be ready to onboard as full Tiwahe sites as soon as Congress provides the additional funds. Tribes are anxious to see Tiwahe expanded to more tribal communities. For this reason, we ask for support of the Native Children's Commission Implementation Act, including making Tiwahe a permanent program, supporting on-going funding provided to the original six Tiwahe sites and the four new demonstration sites, and providing more funding to expand Tiwahe to more tribes including the 12 incubator sites. Because of this, Red Lake encourages this Subcommittee to support the TIBC FY 2027 Budget Recommendations for an **additional \$32 million in Tiwahe funding to support the existing Tiwahe Tribes and to expand Tiwahe to more Tribes**. Tiwahe is aligned with several of the Administration's goals and principals including, promoting government efficiency because the federal government provides the funds and then gets out of the way to let Tribes implement solutions at the local level. Tiwahe is a "whole of tribal government" approach, bringing all programs together to address the root issues for families to thrive, while at the same time increasing efficiency and better use of funding by integrating programs and breaking down silos.

Increase Funding for BIA Law Enforcement, Courts, Detention, and Community Fire Protection. In 2017, Red Lake declared a Public Health Emergency due to a sharp increase in opioid overdoses. Sadly, we continue to see horrific numbers of opioid and fentanyl related overdoses and deaths. Last year we had 37 overdoses and 6 deaths. Although the number of overdoses declined from the previous year, the number of deaths increased by 300%. Part of the problem is non-Indians entering the Reservation to peddle drugs. We routinely banish these criminals and turn them over to other agencies, because we lack the authority to arrest and detain non-Indians. The criminals know this and keep coming back here. We need your support to enact legislation that would authorize Tribal police to arrest and detain non-Indian drug dealers.

Additionally, we need your support to increase funding authorized by the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA). Since TLOA began, BIA public safety funding has shrunk. In the last two years, Red Lake had to spend \$8.5 million more than the BIA provided, which was taken from other critically underfunded Tribal programs. The BIA's latest TLOA report says Tribal law enforcement needs \$1.7 billion per year for minimal public safety. That is more than six-times the current funding level. The report also says Tribal courts need \$1.5 billion per year to provide adequate justice for Tribal citizens. That is thirty two-times the current level. We support the TIBC FY 2027 Budget Recommendations for **an additional \$1.8 billion for Law Enforcement, \$1.5 billion for Tribal Courts, and \$284 million for Detention, and, we ask for an additional \$9.5 million for Red Lake Law Enforcement to combat our drug crisis.**

Community Fire Protection has also been neglected for decades. We are responsible for fighting fires and protecting lives at Red Lake, on a yearly BIA-funded budget of only \$42,500. Our actual expenditures exceed \$1 million each year. We ask that you **provide \$10 million for Community Fire Protection in FY 2027, as well as \$1 million for Red Lake Community Fire Protection.**

Ensure Increases to Trust Natural Resources Support Self-Determination Tribes. Red Lake thanks this Subcommittee for providing General Program Increases for several important natural resource programs in FY 2022 and FY 2023, including Water Resources, Wildlife and Parks, Forestry, and the Tribal Management/Development program (TMDP). These increases are critical

for tribes with large land bases. Red Lake manages the sixth largest freshwater lake in the U.S. on less than \$1 per acre. The BIA did not follow Congressional intent when distributing these funding increases, and in some cases excluded self-governance tribes including Red Lake from receiving their share of the increases. We ask that you direct BIA to provide an equitable share of all funding increases to self-governance tribes, and to follow Congressional intent with respect to General Program Increases, by including an equitable share of any increases to the tribes that operate these programs. **We also urge you to increase funding for the BIA budget categories of Tribal Management Development, Natural Resources TPA, Wildlife and Parks TPA, Water Resources TPA, and Forestry TPA by at least \$5 million each, above the FY 2026 enacted levels.**

Fully Fund IHS at \$74 Billion, Continue Support for Advanced Appropriations. We appreciate your efforts to secure advanced appropriations for IHS in recent years, including for FY 2027. There is a tremendous unmet need for IHS and Tribal health programs, stemming from years of chronic under funding. Mandatory increases for inflation, population growth, pay costs, and CSC surpass enacted increases. We support the IHS Tribal Budget Formulation Workgroup's request to **fully fund IHS and Urban Indian Health at \$74 billion in FY 2027.** We also support budget requests of the National Indian Health Board, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, and others working to address shortfalls in our healthcare systems.

Make Sec. 105(l) Mandatory Spending. Sec. 105(l) leases are a critical tool to ensure federal programs are provided in well-maintained buildings. Red Lake uses Sec. 105(l) leases to maintain our fire halls, criminal justice center, dialysis center, and other critical infrastructure. For this reason, Red Lake calls upon Congress to reclassify Sec. 105(l) leases as mandatory spending.

Fully Fund EPA Programs. Spanning a geographic area the size of West Virginia, 60% of the Indian trust land in EPA Region 5 consists of Red Lake's Reservation. To manage and protect our water, wetlands, animals, and plants, Red Lake relies on critical EPA programs like Tribal GAP, Clean Water Act Sections 106 Pollution Control and 319 Nonpoint Source, Brownfields, and Clean Air Act Section 105. **We urge you to provide robust funding for these programs in FY 2027.**

Increase Funding for Drinking and Wastewater Infrastructure Projects on Tribal Lands. Red Lake maintains 85 miles of water lines and 45 miles of sanitary sewer lines, most of which were installed in the 1960s and are of deteriorating asbestos cement. We have three sewage lagoons that are at, or over capacity, which need to be expanded. Our crumbling water and sewer systems are in dire need of replacement and pose health and safety risks to both users and maintenance staff. We have been unable to get our projects on the IHS sanitation deficiency list because it prioritizes projects where houses are crammed together to provide more service per mile. This unfairly hurts Red Lake, and we have nowhere else to go for financial assistance. **We have six projects totaling \$40 million that are shovel-ready, and we request this amount in FY 2027.**

Thank you for allowing me to discuss some of the most immediate needs of Red Lake and for your consideration of these needs as you advance FY 2027 appropriations.