



National Congress of American Indians



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Action Alert

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Urge Your Senators to Support Tribes in the Interior Bill

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior likely will mark up its FY 2006 Interior spending bill in the next few weeks. This measure includes accounts for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service, the lion's share of federal funding for tribes and tribal governments. As reported in NCAI Broadcast #05-040, the House Interior bill, HR 2361, includes numerous restorations of decreases proposed in the Administration's budget request, such as for Indian education, Tribal Priority Allocations, BIA construction, and IHS facilities construction for a total of \$142 million above the FY 2005 level for Indian programs. The House passed the Interior bill on Thursday May 19 by a vote of 329-89. Considering the tight allocation this year for the Interior Department overall, the badly needed increases for BIA and IHS are noteworthy – **now we need the Senate to follow suit with similar increases from the President's request for Indian programs.**

The federal budget is one of the easiest ways to measure the nation's priorities as a whole, reflecting deeper debates on morality, values, and justice. Thus, member tribes have consistently prioritized fulfillment of the trust responsibility through adequate appropriations to tribes, which is also part of the NCAI Policy Statement. The federal budget must support strong tribal self-sufficiency and self-determination.

As the Senate begins deliberation on the FY 2006 Interior appropriations bill, tribes and tribal leaders must ensure that the needs and priorities of Indian Country are voiced and given sound consideration. Contact your Senators and urge them to support tribal self-determination and self-governance in the FY 2006 Interior Appropriations bill. Below are the members of the Senate Appropriations Interior Subcommittee, who especially need to hear from tribes. Attached is a draft letter to fax or use in calling your Senator.

Senator	Fax #	Senator	Fax #
Conrad Burns, Chair, R-MT	202-224-8594	Byron Dorgan Ranking, D-ND	202-224-1193
Ted Stevens, R-AK	202-224-2354	Robert Byrd, D-WV	202-228-0002
Thad Cochran, R-MS	202-224-9450	Patrick Leahy D-VT	202-224-3479
Pete Domenici, R-NM	202-228-3261	Harry Reid D-NV	202-224-7327
Robert Bennett, R-UT	202-228-1168	Dianne Feinstein, D-CA	202-228-3954
Judd Gregg, R-NH	202-224-4952	Barbara Mikulski, D-MD	202-224-8858
Larry Craig, R-ID	202-228-1067	Herb Kohl, D-WI	202-224-9787
Wayne Allard, R-CO	202-224-6471		

If you have any questions, contact Amber Ebarb at 202-466-7767 or aebarb@ncai.org. Please send a courtesy copy of faxes sent to 202-466-7797.

The Honorable _____
United States Senate
Fax: _____

[Place on Tribal Letterhead]

Dear Senator,

On behalf of [*insert tribal affiliation*] I respectfully ask that you honor the trust, treaty, and statutory obligations to tribes in the FY 2006 Interior appropriations bill by providing tribes with the necessary tools for continued progress through the promise of strong tribal self-determination.

In many ways, tribal governments are exactly like state and municipal governments – providing critical services, shaping values, and promoting jobs and growth. Though federal spending for Indians has lost ground compared to spending for the U.S. population at large, tribal self-government has proven that the federal investment in tribes pays off. According to a recent report by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, reservation communities have made remarkable socio-economic gains in the last decade and these gains are driven by the policy of tribal self-government. Between 1990 and 2000, income levels rose by 33 percent and the poverty rate dropped by 7 percent, with little difference between those tribes with gaming operations and those tribes without gaming.

Yet substantial gaps remain— real per capita income of Indians living on reservations is still less than half of the national average. Indian unemployment is still double the rest of the country. Thus, while the work of tribal self-determination is well underway, much work is left to be done. These long enduring socio-economic disparities, and the success of tribes in addressing them, warrant continued federal investment in tribal self-determination.

I urge you to support tribes and consider the following [*below are examples—can include others*] :

1. Increase for Tribal Priority Allocations: TPA provides tribes with the resources for governmental services at the local level. Providing adequate TPA resources is one of the most practical ways the federal government can further the goals of tribal self-governance.
2. Fully fund contract support costs: These funds are the key to self-determination for tribes, ensuring that tribes have the resources that any federal contractor would require to successfully manage decentralized programs.
3. Increase for Indian education: Johnson O'Malley funds, which received a \$8.8 million proposed cut, the Indian School Equalization Program, and Administrative Cost Grants are all vital to the success of Indian students. I urge you to restore the \$89.5 million cut to Indian school construction funding to help relieve the backlog of construction and repair needs. I also urge you to restore the cuts proposed for tribal colleges.
4. Restore Indian Health Service facilities construction: The President's budget proposed a \$86 million decrease to \$3 million for construction. I urge you to restore these funds.
5. Halt Diverting Funds for Trust Reorganization: The budget request includes a significant initiative to increase funding for trust management within the BIA and the Office of Special Trustee. The ongoing reorganization of the BIA is creating a top-heavy bureaucracy that does not meet the real need for trust management on the reservations. Tribal leaders have repeatedly emphasized that funding needed to correct problems and inefficiencies in DOI trust management must not come from existing BIA programs or administrative monies. The Department must request additional funding from Congress to correct the internal problems created through their administrative mistakes rather than depleting existing, insufficient BIA program dollars for these purposes.