

April 4, 2014

Secretary Jewell  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell,

We write to you as the Tribal co-chairs of the Tribal/Interior Budget Council (TIBC) with three recommendations to improve the Interior Department's fulfillment of the United States' treaty, trust, and other responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives. As background, TIBC's mission is below:

*The TIBC provides a forum and process, consistent with the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, Section 450 a-1, Executive Order #13175, and Department of the Interior's (DOI) Government-to-Government policy, whereby tribes and the Department work together to develop policy and budgets that provide for 1) the Department to fulfill its trust responsibilities and treaty obligations; and 2) the fulfillment of tribes' inherent sovereign rights of self-determination, self-governance, and self-sufficiency, as well as securing levels of funding necessary to strengthen Tribal governmental capacity to serve their Tribal citizens and communities.*

The Tribal Caucus of the TIBC has identified some recommendations that we believe will help strengthen the work of the Council that we would like to propose to you.

1. Request for TIBC to be the Interior Secretary's Tribal Advisory Council

The Tribal Representatives on the TIBC consist of twenty-four elected or appointed Tribal officials, nominated and selected to serve on the TIBC by the tribes in their region, two from each of the 12 BIA Regions. The Tribal Representatives from each region advocate on behalf of tribes in their region. The Interior Department should seek to implement a DOI Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC), improving upon the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) STAC, by having the tribal leaders determined by their own regions instead of selected by the Department. A STAC's primary purpose is to seek consensus, exchange views, share information, provide advice and/or recommendations; or facilitate any other interaction related to intergovernmental responsibilities or administration of Departmental programs. Moreover, having two advisory committees within DOI could cause confusion and result in conflicting recommendations.

2. TIBC Engagement with the Secretary's Office

The TIBC leadership requests that you would engage with the TIBC process to hear Tribal input and concerns with the BIA budget and the BIA Budget Formulation Process at least once annually. The HHS national budget consultation could serve as a model of successful Secretarial engagement with Tribes.

3. Meeting Strategic Plan Mission and Goals in the Budget

The TIBC Tribal Leaders appreciate that the DOI Strategic Plan FY 2014-2018 includes goals for Indian Country (excerpts below).

**MISSION AREA #2:** Strengthening Tribal Nations and Insular Communities Initiatives will improve the nation-to-nation relationships with tribes and fulfill the United States' trust responsibilities through partnerships to build stronger economies and safer Indian communities.

**Goal 1:** Meet Our Trust, Treaty, and Other Responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives

- Protect reserved Indian treaty and subsistence rights
- Fulfill fiduciary trust

**Goal 2:** Improve the Quality of Life in Tribal and Native Communities

- Support self-governance and self-determination
- Create economic opportunity
- Strengthen Indian education
- Make communities safer

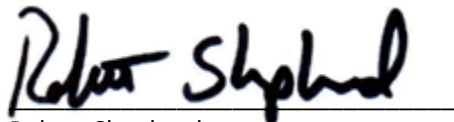
The mission and goals are excellent guideposts and should be reflected in the Department's budget priorities and decisions. Even as the FY 2015 Budget fully funds tribal contract support costs (long a priority for tribes), the BIA would receive only a 1.3 percent increase in current appropriations over the FY14 enacted level compared to a 2.6 percent increase to the DOI's discretionary budget overall (not including BIA). As tribal leaders, we understand the constraints of tight fiscal times and the tough choices facing federal departments. TIBC appreciates that, for instance, the US Geological Survey, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Reclamation and other Interior bureaus are increasingly engaging with tribes. Increased tribal engagement is good, to the extent that non-BIA bureaus are assisting tribes, providing resources and upholding the federal trust responsibility.

The BIA provides the primary resources for carrying out the core governmental services to about 2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. Tribes are addressing urgent needs related to poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, public safety, and other challenges that have resulted from unfair dealings and historical trauma. Even as other agencies work to improve meeting their obligations to tribes, TIBC urges you to ensure that the BIA budget can provide the resources that modern and sophisticated tribal governments require to accomplish the DOI goals for Tribes. Tribes would like to work with you to meet the mission and goals laid out in the DOI's Strategic Plan.

Conclusion

Tribal people have long had a holistic understanding of our place in the natural environment and of the need for balance. Yet Tribal government leaders are still seeking ways to balance the needs of our tribal citizens with the short funding provided through BIA dollars, which represent treaty promises and not only line items. Tribal leaders appreciated your comments made at the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Mid-Year conference in June of 2013. In your remarks, you acknowledged the scale and importance of upholding the trust and treaty obligations owed to American Indians and Alaska Natives. We know that you take this responsibility very seriously and we look forward to working with you to help improve the Department's fulfillment of these solemn obligations together. With your remaining 3 years in office, we hope to witness a long-term improvement for Indian Country. Please do not hesitate to reach out to us or Jacqueline Pata, NCAI Executive Director, at [jpata@ncai.org](mailto:jpata@ncai.org), or 202-466-7767 extension 217.

Sincerely,



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