

Statement of Interior Subcommittee Chairman Mike Simpson
Indian Affairs FY12 Budget Hearing
Assistant Secretary Larry Echo Hawk
March 30, 2011

Good afternoon, Assistant Secretary Larry Echo Hawk. I'd like to welcome you, along with BIA Director Michael Black and BIE Director Keith Moore, to the House Appropriations Committee's hearing on the FY 2012 budget for Indian Affairs.

Assistant Secretary, you and I go back many years to the days of the Idaho State Legislature, and I have always held you in the highest regard. I hope I am able to continue to work with you for years to come in our respective current capacities, as we attempt to make a difference in the lives of over 1.4 million Native Americans and Alaskan Natives.

As you may have gathered by now—particularly from looking at H.R. 1—honoring this nation's commitments to Indian Country is a high priority for the subcommittee in this Congress. The FY 2012 budget for Indian Affairs concerns us greatly, as it calls for a \$119 million reduction from 2010. I can't help but note the irony of the request in light of the fact that this subcommittee is still fighting tooth and nail just to keep Indian Affairs level-funded for 2011.

I have no doubt that you share our concerns about the 2012 budget request, as those of us here today are painfully aware of the unmet needs in Indian Country. While our collective attention on international affairs is aimed squarely at current events overseas, here at home we continue to have people who live in third-world conditions. If you want to see real poverty in this country, go visit a reservation.

If only it were true that increasing public awareness or increasing the Indian Affairs budget alone would solve these problems. Earlier this year the Acting Inspector General testified before this subcommittee that she could spend her entire budget on Indian Country issues and still not address every problem. To me that suggests that the system in place now is fundamentally broken.

I have no doubts about this Administration's collective and genuine commitment to Indian Country, and about your skill in identifying problems and adaptively managing through solutions.

What I'm interested in is where the Department goes from here, how it gets there, and how it measures success. I look forward to our discussion of the budget today in the context of those questions.