

**TESTIMONY OF
Mr. Tracy 'Ching' King
President
Fort Belknap Indian Community
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, Montana**

**BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

March 27, 2012

I am pleased to be here today to provide input for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service FY2012 Budgets on behalf of the 7,000 Gros Ventre and Assiniboine tribal members of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation located in North Central Montana.

My testimony today is directed towards the Fiscal Year 2012 Appropriations budget of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service and Education programs. Tribal governments, just like state and municipal governments, provide critical services, shape values, and promote jobs and growth on our respective reservations. Though federal spending for Indians has lost ground compared to spending for the U.S. population at large, tribal self-governments have proven that the federal investment in tribes pays off.

Our local tribal governments which address the concerns and needs of our local constituents have the most at stake, we are the party responsible for our citizens and ultimately the ones most accountable for the economic conditions, and protection and safety of our tribal members that reside in our reservation communities. The following information is provided to you through the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council and in collaboration with the programs funded through P. L. 93-638 programs contracted by our tribal government from each of the respective entities.

**BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS
CORRECTIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT & TRIBAL COURTS**

Detention/Corrections

- Requesting \$2,000,000. in funding for additional staffing and equipment for our detention officers working in our new the facility that is to be completed in April 2012. We need 18 staff members to cover rotating shifts, and operation and maintenance of the new facility and our remodeled older facility. The current budget for the Fort Belknap Corrections Division is \$214,000. far less that what we need to operate a safe environment for offenders that will occupy our facility.

Law Enforcement

- We currently offer inadequate salaries for our law enforcement officers. Tribal police departments cannot compete for officers that are paid much higher salaries by county, state, and Bureau of Indian Affairs law enforcement agencies. Once trained in BIA academies, the officers then leave for higher paying jobs which include health insurance coverage and other benefits which attract these officers. The cost of training officers is very high and Tribes must cover their salary of the officer being trained for 12-16 weeks, and also their temporary replacements that provide law enforcement services while they are at training. Fort Belknap is requesting \$1,500,000 for law enforcement services.

Tribal Courts

- Requesting \$350,000. to fund needed additional staff positions such as public defenders, associate judges, and presenting officers. We also need to update computer software/data collection systems, provide staff training and update technology in our court filing system.

LAND

Tribal Land Department

- Requesting \$2,000,000 to modernize our tribal land department. We need to purchase business solution that implement technology which would put all of the tribal leases and land holdings onto software programs to make them compatible with the BIA and state land departments.

ROADS MAINTENANCE

Roads Maintenance

- Our roads maintenance department is responsible for maintaining the reservation road system that encompasses the 725,000 acres of our reservation. Our current needs are to improving the roads with overlay and regular maintenance. The bridges on our roads are near the critical stage of replacement. We need \$3,000,000 for these activities.

OIL & GAS & MINERALS

Gas, Oil, and Mineral Development Office

- We are desperately in need of professional staff assisting the Tribal Council in

developing an energy department within the tribal structure in order that we will have the expertise in the development of our tribal energy resources of natural gas, oil and minerals. We are requesting \$200,000 for start up funds for this endeavor.

WATER

Indian Water Rights and Water Compact Settlements

- We ask that you continue to recognize the Indian Water Rights of Tribes across this country. Fort Belknap is the home of the Winters Doctrine, where Indian reserved water rights began, and is the doctrine that protects and enhances these rights beginning with the U.S. Supreme Court decision. Support for water claims in Congress now and in the future is important. We will be introducing the Fort Belknap Water Compact settlement in excess of \$500 million to Congress in the near future for funding.

Irrigation Projects

- ***Requesting \$1,250,000 for continued operation and maintenance of the Milk River Irrigation Project*** that provides quality water services to area farmers and ranchers for stock and crop production.

Litigation Support & Attorney Fees

- Additionally, ***we are requesting \$450,000 for Water Rights Attorney fees funding under CFR 89*** to assist the Tribal Council with litigation and assistance in submitting our water compact to Congress. Nationally, we are requesting \$10 million.

EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING

Higher Education Scholarships

- Higher Education Scholarship funding for Indian students are needed to attract and support individuals into various professions. These students once graduated would come back to reservations and provide quality professional services to our tribal members. Increase funding level by \$20 million nationally.

Tribal College Funding

- Increase the amount of funding for Fort Belknap College and tribal colleges across the nation for students receiving funding in the amount of \$8,000 per student as they currently only receive half of that amount. Other minority colleges receive funding for their students is twice that amount, and our students deserve the same.

Employment and Training Programs

- Requesting \$2,000,000 for workforce training/development and summer youth employment programs to prepare tribal members for employment, and especially our young adults that would prepare them for future employment. We have over 400 adults and 900 youths needing assistance.

CONTRACTUAL SUPPORT

- We request that funds be provided to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for an increase in this line item for all of the P. L. 93-638 programs that Tribes across the country need to support these programs

INDIAN HEALTH SERVICE

WATER TREATMENT PLANT

- Fort Belknap requests Operation and Maintenance costs for the following public water supply operations in the reservation communities. On Fort Belknap there are five (5) different water systems that serve the communities of the Agency, Lodge Pole, and Hays. We have a total of 3,000 water users from 591 service connections and it costs \$776,498 annually to operate the system. Limited customer revenue and a small tribally paid subsidy generates \$234,610, leaving a balance of \$543,888, which the Tribe cannot afford. We are experiencing a shortage of operation and maintenance funds. ***We are requesting an annual funding amount of \$543,888.*** to pay the operation and maintenance costs of these systems.

Special Diabetes Programs for Indians & Dialysis Center for Patients

- Additional funds for our diabetes patients need increased funding to properly diagnose and treat this deadly disease. ***We strongly support a funding level of \$200 million annually for SPDI for Indian Tribes*** that desperately need dialysis centers on reservations as our people have to travel great distances to receive these treatments causing great hardship to them and also a financial burden on tribes that assist dialysis patients in going to their scheduled appointments.

Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

- Request that you increase the funding to SAMHSA grants to \$15 million nationwide in order that Indian tribes such as Fort Belknap can apply for these funds and services.

Indian Professionals

- We fully support the Indian Health Scholarship funding for Indian students. This is a great opportunity that will assist in attracting and supporting students into the health professions. These students once graduated would come back to reservations and provide high quality medical services to our tribal members.

Suicide and Methamphetamine Treatment and Prevention Initiative

- We fully support the an increase to \$16.4 million for this program. We have had 1 suicide and 4 attempts this past month. But, we also want the IHS to develop and utilize a distribution plan of these funds in order that all Tribes share equally.