

House Appropriations Subcommittee

March 17, 2026

American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearing (Day 1, Afternoon Session)

Opening Statements:

Neither [Rep. Mike Simpson](#), Chairman (R-ID) nor [Rep. Chellie Pingree](#), Ranking Member (D-ME) provided substantial opening statements outside of a brief greeting and logistics.

Highlights:

- Similar to the morning session, witnesses focused on the importance of appropriate funding as well as advanced appropriations of funding for BIA, BIE, and IHS.

Witness Statements:

[Chuck Hoskin, Jr.](#), Principal Chief (Cherokee Nation)

- Foremost responsibility is the welfare of 475,000 citizens of Cherokee Nation and protection of sovereignty.
- Cherokee Nation is the home to America's first medical school in Indian Country; 2027 will see the opening of a nursing school with the University of Oklahoma.
- The federal government must meet its commitment to tribes, but Congress should not tolerate wasteful spending, duplicative spending, or spending that undermines tribal treaty rights
- Maintain that Cherokee Nation is the exclusive tribal sovereign governing the Cherokee Nation reservation.
- Need the Committee's support for the SBA 8(a) Business Development Program as it works for Indian Country.
- Need to provide direct funding for Tribes impacted by the McGirt decision.
- Committee should support Tribal Self-Governance and Self-Determination by fully implementing laws like the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and the 477 Program – this empowers Tribal Nations to administer programs for own citizens with efficiency and effectiveness.
- Meaningful consultation is required, which the Departments of Education, Interior, and Labor fell short in doing; Tribes weren't given early opportunities to provide input. Notification is not consultation.
- In an exchange with Rep. Simpson, Chief Hoskin encouraged the Committee to scrutinize requests that set up duplicative systems particularly in relation to healthcare programs.

[Jonodev Chaudhuri](#), Ambassador (Muskogee Creek Nation)

- We represent the interests of over 100,000 enrolled citizens.

- It is our intention that MCN testimony can serve as a steppingstone for improved dialogue and partnership between Congress and tribal nations.
- Substantial funding gap still exists for Native American Programs at DOI, especially in BIA programs.
- Some local authorities have relied on the Supreme Court's Castro Huerta decision in refusing to inform MCN of cases where our citizens are victimized.
- It is important for congress to retain funding levels for public safety in courts and in Indian Country and must consider increasing capacity building funds.
- Encourage Congress to work with Tribes to enable Tribes partnering with the Department of Justice to construct or refurbish detention facilities.
- Based on FY 24 funding levels, there exists a funding short fall over of over \$12 million for Creek nation's Agriculture and Natural Resources programs and functions.
- Retain existing funding levels and increasing capacity building funds to support land management and development activities.

[Rep. Jake Ellzey](#) (R-TX)

- With the long border shared between Cherokee and MCN, in what ways do you cooperate and how could Congress / the Committee help moving forward?

Principal Chief Hoskin

- Great admiration for each other's law enforcement and anything that enhances the working relationship between the two tribes would help.
- Drilling down to facts and frontline experience would help sort out the narrative around urban areas like Tulsa.

Ambassador Chaudhuri

- Echo Chief Hoskin's comments as there's a shared interest in supporting Tribal sovereignty and protecting citizens in our borders.
- Not all counties and municipalities have been equally cooperative in terms of referral of law enforcement information.

[James Naranjo](#), Governor (Santa Clara Pueblo)

- We have about 56,000 acres with less than 2000 members in our Tribe.
- Only have 8 law enforcement officers, a self-governance Tribe within the city of Espanola so these cross commission but with no funding.
- We lose employees across all sectors (e.g. education, policing) to higher paying Counties; Tribe ends up supplementing to retain good, qualified law enforcement officers.
- Asking the federal government to keep its trust obligations to help SCP as a small Tribal nation in protecting sacred sites, the Chaco Canyon, and traditional ways of life.

Charles Riley, Governor (Pueblo of Acoma in New Mexico)

- Appreciate the Subcommittee's bipartisan efforts to protect BIA and IHS from federal funding cuts.
- Asking to support full funding for Indian water settlements, promoting economic development and water security.
- Request that this subcommittee provide funding for resource management plan, amendment and implementation of Programmatic Agreement for the Bureau of Land Management, Farmington office.
- An updated plan is needed for protection of cultural sites around Chaco Canyon.
- Dedicate IHS maintenance and improvement and other facility construction funding to the Haku Health Center to offset significant repairs needed for this facility to become operational.
- Urge Congress to increase funding to properly staff BIA, BIE and IHS, which are instrumental in the U.S. honoring its unique trust responsibilities to the Pueblo and other Tribes. The Pueblo has experienced significant delays from federal offices as a result of reduction of staff.

Hon. Verlon Jose, Chairman (Tohono O'odham Nation)

- Need for Congress to prioritize funding for our roads (there are more than 700 miles of BIA roads on TON) as the BIA road maintenance program has been underfunded for years and has a deferred backlog of over \$400 million more funding.
- Water rights settlement has never been fully implemented due to chronic underfunding. Annual funding must be made available.
- Federal funding vital to address unique public safety challenges with the Nation sharing a 62 mile border with Mexico. Nation would appreciate more federal funding to support our efforts.
- Funding investments also needed for our failing IHS facilities. A replacement for the IHS facility in Sells, AZ has been on the priority list for over 30 years. Congress must appropriate more funding to complete the facilities on the list.
- More funding for IBE facilities is also needed. Two of TON schools are on the BIE list of facilities in poor conditions. We urge more funding to ensure BIE schools can be renovated and replaced.

Dr. Buu Nygren, President (Navajo Nation)

- Navajo Nation supports advanced appropriations beyond FY2027 for IHS and expands it to programs within BIA and BIE.
- Despite federal trust obligations, federal investment remains far below what is needed.
- We continue to urge Congress to increase funding for the Indian School equalization program by at least 400 million and fully fund school safety initiatives, including this for school resource officers.

- The BIA estimates that public safety needs in Indian Country total 3.1 billion annually, yet current funding levels are less than 450 million.
- The Bie needs more assistance in its digitization probate efforts to help reduce this backlog. It is essential that on the Navajo Nation alone, there are tens of millions of dollars in assets in the probate backlog.
- Congress also needs to strengthen funding for programs that protect Native children and families as seen in sever underfunding for ICWA.
- Navajo Nation has approximately \$6 million shortfall in its ICWA program.

[Francys Crevier](#), Chief Executive Officer (National Council for Urban Indian Health)

- Urban Indian Organizations (UIOs) are integral in the Indian Health System as they provide high quality healthcare to Tribal members living in urban areas.
- IHS has been chronically underfunded so echo request of Tribal leaders for IHS and urban Indian health to be fully funded and maintain advanced appropriations.
- We ask that IHS receive mandatory and full funding to help recruit and retain healthcare professionals.

[A.C. Locklear](#), Chief Executive Officer (National Indian Health Board)

- For decades, Congress has provided steady support for IHS through incremental funding increases, and we are grateful, but incremental progress is no longer enough. Substantive investment is needed to:
 - Address workforce shortages
 - Modernize infrastructure
 - Strengthen care delivery across the system.
- Encouraged by Secretary Kennedy's recent announcement to direct 1 billion in funding towards healthcare facilities construction to begin addressing the long standing 1993 backlog.

[Abigail Echo-Hawk](#), Executive Vice President (Seattle Indian Health Board)

- With the work force shortages in Indian Health Service and the lack of work force development funding, we invest more than 500,000 of our own dollars.
- Full funding of the Indian health is essential at the full \$73 billion and ensure that the Tribal Epidemiology centers are essential to the health and wellbeing of our communities.

[Conrad Jacket](#), Board Member (Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board, Inc.)

- We consist of the two bands of Navajo (ToHajiilee and Ramah), the two Apache tribes, Mescalero and Jicarilla and the two Ute tribes, Southern Ute and Ute Mountain.
- As we all know, IHS has been underfunded for years. But Congress must find new ways to increase IHS funding so that it keeps pace with inflation.
- Ask that Congress continue to provide advanced appropriations while the Administration realigns within IHS.

- Support Medicaid with expanded coverage for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

[Teresa Sanchez](#), Board President (Riverside-San Bernardino County Indian Health, Inc.)

- We thank the subcommittee for allocating funds in the IHS budget for several years to help tribal health programs secure generators.
- Tribal entities depend on loans and limited third party revenue for clinic construction and staffing, while IHS often fails to uphold its legal trust obligation to California tribes.
- Tribal Health Programs rely on PRC funding for specialty and non-primary care services. However, the California area receives the sixth lowest PRC funding per patient.
- Request that the subcommittee include provisions in the appropriations bill to ensure equitable FSA funding for the California IHS area.

[Esther Lucero](#), President and CEO (Seattle Indian Health Board)

- Asking for over \$1 billion in investment in our urban Indian Health Organization.
- A program like Seattle Indian Health Board that started with one family medicine residency program, and now we have 32 training programs, 32 learning programs, should equate to an additional investment.

[Aaron Hines](#), Chairman (Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board)

- There's commonality in what the subcommittee is hearing today
- Request that the Administration and Congress continue to honor the trust responsibility the federal government owes the Tribes.
- With advanced appropriations for FY26, 27, and 28 there's quite a bit of shortfall in terms of fully funding IHS so we need to talk about mandatory funding.

[Leannandra Ross](#), Vice President (Executive and Tribal Services fo South Central Foundation)

- SCF is one of the 10 largest employers in Alaska and provides healthcare services to over 70,000 customer owners.
- SCF services depend on the Indian Health Service appropriations.
- There is insufficient housing that supports workforce development or recruitment.
- Additional federal support would significantly strengthen our ability to recruit and retain providers to reliably deliver care, especially as the new recent rural healthcare transformation.
- Direct IHS through report language to fully utilize its authority to set aside funding for workforce development scholarships, administered by tribes and tribal organizations.
- Need advanced appropriations in mandatory funding to keep clinics open during federal funding disruptions.

[Angelique Albert](#), Chief Executive Officer (Native Forward Scholar Fund)

- Last year alone, native forward documented a \$17.8 million unmet need among the students applying for Bie funding scholarships alone, and demand is surging.
- I urge the subcommittee to increase its support for Bie funded scholarship and financial aid programs in FY 27.
- Native Forward could support 629 out of 12,000 scholarship applications this year, but there is \$340 million unmet financial need in this figure.

[Ahniwake Rose](#), President and CEO (American Indian Higher Education Consortium)

- TCUs operate currently 35 tribal colleges and universities that are accredited across the United States, and six states, in 16 states.
- Tens of thousands of TCU alumni are currently employed across the US, and their collective contributions generate \$3.8 billion in added income to the national economy.
- TCUs represent a practical and strategic partner to strengthen healthcare workforce serving tribal nations.
- Given the documented workforce shortages, there is a clear opportunity to better align TCU nursing graduates with the existing IHS workforce needs.
- This subcommittee could fund a designated set aside.
- We stand ready to support the committee as a partner to advance targeted workforce needs and solutions within IHS, as the subcommittee considers these workforce strategies.

[Cecilia Fire Thunder](#), President (Lakota Nation Education Coalition)

- Our local control Bureau of Indian Education schools are underfunded, outdated and in some cases unsafe.
- How come four school systems on one reservation get funded differently?

[Aurene Martin](#), Secretary of Board of Directors (National Indian Child Welfare Association)

- Based out of Portland OR, NICWA focuses on strengthening policies and services that improve outcomes for Native children and families.
- Tribal self-determination and tribal sovereignty are essential to building effective human service systems for our people.
- Across the country, tribal nations are redesigning their human services programs to better reflect their values, strengthen family engagement and improve outcomes, and these efforts are working on child welfare.

