

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-3208

February 28, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
H-232 The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear President Obama, Majority Leader Reid & Speaker Boehner:

We write to express our opposition to funding cuts for Native American programs in any final budget agreement related to sequestration. Such cuts would compromise the federal trust responsibility that the U.S. government maintains with the Native American people and would hinder Native American businesses vital to the overall health of our economy.

In Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution, the founding fathers created a relationship of sovereignty and trust between the U.S. government and the Indian tribes. Today, many tribes exercise their right to be self-governing and to take and manage program funds to best fit the needs of their citizens under P.L. 93-638, the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. The U.S. Supreme Court has consistently affirmed this relationship throughout history by upholding self-governance and self-determination contracts between tribes and the United States.¹

The benefits that stem from tribal self-determination ripple throughout regional areas and the national economy, improving life for tribal citizens and non-Indians alike. According to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), tribes contribute to regional revenues through a diverse array of enterprises, including construction, logging, timber, propane, pharmacies, health services, gas, groceries, radio stations and insurance businesses.

The automatic sequestration cuts are potentially devastating. For example, new estimates from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget indicate that the Indian Health Service (IHS) and tribal hospitals and clinics would be forced to provide 3,000 fewer inpatient admissions and 804,000 fewer outpatient visits if subjected to sequestration. IHS employs approximately 15,700 people. It provides a wide range of clinical, public health and community services and serves 2.1 million American Indians and Alaska Natives at over 650 hospitals, clinics, and health stations on or near Indian reservations. Cuts to IHS would significantly limit its impact to patients and the economy.

¹ See *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, 30 U.S. 1, (2005) and *Salazar v. Ramah Navajo Chapter*, 132 S. Ct. 2181 (2012).

Funding cuts to Native American programs would also devastatingly increase the poverty disparity between Indian communities and the general U.S. population. NCAI reports that poverty for tribal citizens on reservation and trust land is more than 2.5 times higher than for the total population. Unemployment rates are at 18.8 percent for the Native civilian labor force, more than two times as high as the general unemployment rate in the country.

NCAI data also reports that the percentage of reservation homes lacking complete plumbing is 17 times the national average, 19 percent of tribal households still have no telephone service and overcrowding in reservation homes is almost nine times higher for Native villages than it is for the entire nation. The roads in Indian Country comprise the most underdeveloped roadway network in the nation and critical 21st century infrastructure, such as broadband access, is also severely underdeveloped. Undeniably, further cuts to Indian tribes will only exacerbate these problems, posing concerns for tribal health, safety and economic security.

We have made a commitment to the Indian tribes in the U.S. Constitution and in many laws that the Congress has enacted over time. Accordingly, it is important to arrive at a budget resolution that upholds these commitments by protecting funding to Native American programs in a manner that is fair and just.

Sincerely,



HAKEEM S. JEFFRIES
Member of Congress



BRUCE BRALEY
Member of Congress



ENI FALEOMAVAEGA
Member of Congress



RAUL M. GRIJALVA
Member of Congress



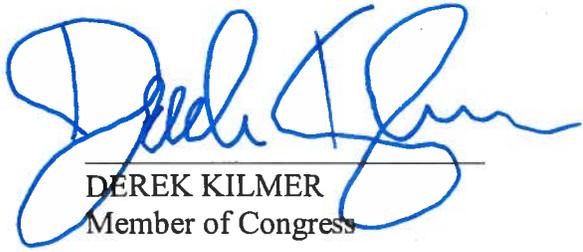
ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress



DENNY HECK
Member of Congress



WALTER B. JONES
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DEREK KILMER
Member of Congress



ALAN LOWENTHAL
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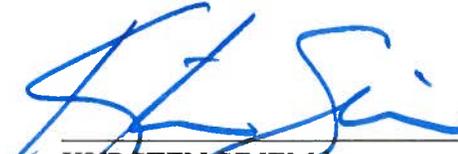
NEGRETE MCLEOD
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CHARLES RANGEL
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KYRSTEN SINEMA
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