

October 26, 2015

Senate Leadership

Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee

Members of the Senate Budget Committee

U.S. Senate

Washington, D.C. 20515

House Leadership

Members of the House Appropriations Committee

Members of the House Budget Committee

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senators and Representatives,

We write as an interfaith community concerned for some whose voices are often drowned out by more powerful interests or larger constituencies – Native peoples in this country.

We ask you to keep in mind that centuries and decades ago, in exchange for land and livelihoods, Native Americans were promised that the U.S. government would support their economic, physical, and spiritual well-being. The poverty and relative powerlessness of Native peoples in this century speaks of the shame of the U.S. government, which has not kept its commitments through generations. We acknowledge the role of the faith community in that history, and today we are committed to advocating for just policies toward Native Americans.

As you prepare a Continuing Resolution or some form of omnibus appropriations bill or “budget deal,” we ask you consider that the promises made to Indian country – some in the form of treaties – are not “discretionary” promises. These commitments were made before the Budget Control Act, and before any recessions or booms that the U.S. economy has experienced. These commitments stand on their own, and should be fulfilled as mandatory items in the budget.

We ask you to pay particular attention to:

- Additional funding for school re-construction, to bring schools for Native American children in line with the similar-sized federally operated school system for the children of military personnel;
- Additional funding for health facilities, to support the delivery of health care on reservations with more land than resources;
- Funding for traditional language immersion programs, from pre-school through post-graduate programs, to assist Native peoples in reclaiming and passing on their languages and the cultures that are interwoven into their languages;

- Additional funding for the range of programs that prevent youth suicide – an epidemic in Indian country; and
- Additional funding to support programs addressing violence against Native American women.

There are many needs in Indian country. The federal government should provide adequate funding for the essentials of life, not as a gift or as charity, but as the fulfillment of commitments made at the founding and throughout the expansion of this nation.

Your task is a difficult one. We wish you the best in clear thinking and courage as you try to balance the many needs of the nation.

Sincerely,

Advocacy for Justice and Peace Committee of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

American Friends Service Committee

Conference of Major Superiors of Men

Disciples Center for Public Witness

Disciples Home Missions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Evangelical Church in America

Franciscan Action Network

Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office

Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate-Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office

Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity

National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Council of Churches, USA

NETWORK, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby

Sacred Hoop Native American Ministries (Disciples of Christ)

Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

The Office of Social Justice of the Christian Reformed Church

Union for Reform Judaism

Unitarian Universalist Association

United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

United Methodist Church: General Board of Church and Society

Yakama Christian Mission

Friends Committee on National Legislation

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