



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #MOH-17-028

TITLE: Calling Upon U.S. Department of Agriculture and Congress to Examine the Impacts of the Proposed U.S. Department of Agriculture Reorganization and Budget on Indian Country

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WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, Article 23 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples recognizes that “Indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for exercising their right to development. In particular, indigenous peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions;” and

WHEREAS, food and agriculture production is a major economic, employment driver in Indian Country with more than 56,092 American Indian and Alaska Native-operated farms and ranches and food businesses, a number which continues to grow, on more than 57 million acres of land, selling more \$3.3 billion products annually, which have important stabilizing effects in Indian Country communities; and

WHEREAS, more than 35 percent of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in rural areas and a majority of Tribal Nations’ land bases are located in remote and rural areas lacking access to critical infrastructure, economic development opportunities, and other vital services; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is the only major federal agency primarily charged with providing services, support, and opportunities for farmers, ranchers, and food businesses and critical infrastructure to all of rural America by providing support in food safety, housing, business and economic development, telecommunications and broadband, water and waste water systems, crop insurance, nutrition and food assistance, land conservation, forestry, research, and farm and ranch assistance; and

WHEREAS, the rural development focus and variety of programs within the Rural Development mission area makes USDA an extremely important agency for Tribal Nations and Tribal citizens in carrying out the federal trust responsibility and providing opportunities and support for Tribal self-determination leading to self-governance; and

WHEREAS, the President's Fiscal Year 2018 budget proposed a 21 percent cut to USDA, including: funding cuts to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative, and the U.S. Forest Service; staffing and program cuts to Rural Development; and the elimination of Rural Business and Cooperative Service and Water and Waste Water Loan and Grant Program, among others; and

WHEREAS, the reorganization recently announced by USDA moves the Natural Conservation Service (NRCS) within another mission area of USDA: the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment would now only oversee the U.S. Forest Service; and

WHEREAS, the proposed reorganization would also eliminate the Rural Development mission area and the Under Secretary for Rural Development in order to create a new Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs; and

WHEREAS, Tribes have only had access to NRCS programs since 1990 and Tribes' access to Rural Development programs and services that build critical water, wastewater, electric, broadband, community facility and other economic and business development opportunities and infrastructure have only recently increased substantially as the relationship between Tribes and USDA continues to improve; and

WHEREAS, the proposed budgetary cuts and reorganization will reduce the services to Tribal Nations across the board, especially in land and resource conservation and rural infrastructure, economic, and business development.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) calls upon the USDA and the Office of Tribal Relations to engage in Tribal consultation to hear from Tribal governments on any input the impacts that any USDA reorganization change will have on Tribal access to conservation programs, infrastructure grants, loans, and programs, and economic development programs and the impact on treaty obligations; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that NCAI calls upon Congress to exercise its oversight jurisdiction by holding hearings with Tribal witnesses and input, request a Congressional Research Service (CRS) report on the impacts of the proposed USDA reorganization and budget on services and programs in Indian Country, and further work with Tribal governments before approving any legislation allowing it to go forward; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2017 Midyear Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Mohegan Sun Convention Center, June 12 to June 15, 2017, with a quorum present.


Brian Cladoosby, President

ATTEST:


Aaron Payment, Recording Secretary