

**Oral Testimony of Hon. Harold C. Frazier
Chairman, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe**

Before the U.S House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Full Committee Hearing on “No Road Map, No Destination, No Justification: The Implementation and Impacts of the Reorganization of the Department of the Interior”

April 30, 2019

Good Morning. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify.

My name is Harold Frazier. I am Chairman of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Our Tribe has 21,000 tribal members. Our reservation is roughly the size of Connecticut.

I am also Chairman of the Great Plains Tribal Chairmen’s Association. We operate schools, hospitals, police, fire and EMT services, courts, nutrition, utilities, water, sewer and sanitation programs. We strive to make our reservations livable homes.

Interior’s Reorganization was not thought through. The Secretary started with the idea that one Federal official is the same as another. No plan was presented—just a “river basin” map, two or three Power Point slides, and slogans. “100 year plan,” “streamline,” “efficiency,” “No RIF.”

Secretary Zinke pledged to work with Indian Tribes as “equals.” He said, “sovereignty must mean something.” Yet, he compared Interior to the Military and said we had too many senior people. “We need more boots on the ground,” he said.

Senior executives were moved from post-to-post. Our Great Plains Regional Director went on detail to other BIA Regions twice, for six-month stints. Then he was permanently assigned as the BIA Regional Director for another Region, and a temporary BIA Area Director was sent to the Great Plains for six months, and then sent back home. Great Plains still does not have a permanent BIA Regional Director.

It was a waste of time: Lots of downtime, Lost opportunities Failed decision-making. Interior called back authority to DC from BIA Regions on land into trust and other issues—not a Regional approach. We can't get a clear answer, a focused effort, or real solutions to real issues.

BIA and Indian offices were not included in planning. There were a couple of meetings with Tribes but no real consultation. We were told if we did not like it, opt out.

Interior's goals did not mention Indian tribes. The plan did not address Indian issues and did not prioritize our people. It would have been irresponsible for us to participate. We said, "No."

In August 2018, Interior announced that new Regions would apply to all of Department Bureaus and Agencies, except BIA, BIE and Office of Special Trustee. We were told that since Indian Tribes opted-out, there was no further need to consult with us.

In our official GPTCA letter, we said: The Reorganization are goals for managing rocks and trees, and watersheds. Great Plains declines to support the DOI Reorganization. "We are Native Peoples, not rocks and trees." We need a better approach.

ELEVATE THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY – INDIAN AFFAIRS TO DEPUTY SECRETARY: The [new] Deputy Secretary for Indian Affairs ... should work directly with the Secretary, the President and Congress. There should be no changes or elimination of our BIA Regional Offices without our prior consent.

We called on the Secretary for national roundtable discussions with Indian tribes. There was no response.

Interior Does Not Honor the United States' Treaty Obligations

Our Treaties say that the U.S. will have an Agency at our Reservation. In 2011, the BIA abandoned our joint Agency Tribal Building when black mold grew after BIA roof repairs failed. BIA got its own rental offices but left the Tribe to search for our space. Tribal offices are located in condemned school

dormitories. Our Government is fragmented, services are interrupted. The BIA Building is an abandoned eye sore at the heart of our community.

Our Treaties say the U.S. will provide Education. Our High School is past the end of its useful life after 60+ years of service, the BIE has not kept up on maintenance, so our school is not ranked on the BIE replacement list. Our -20 degree below zero winter weather blows into the school rooms. We need immediate replacement, so students can concentrate on learning rather than fighting the cold throughout the school day.

Our infrastructure is crumbling. The Army Corps continues to operate the Oahe Reservoir and Power Plant, generating over 2 billion kilowatt hours annually—enough to power over homes in 5 states. The Missouri River is polluted—it can't be dredged because there are heavy metal tailings in the river bottom. Our rivers and creeks are flooding, damaging communities and destroying roads, bridges and infrastructure.

We need real help. Instead, BIA proposed 10% cuts for Indian programs while it sought funding for Reorganization. That's an abdication of the Federal trust responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The Secretary should respect Indian Nations. Many of our Indian Tribes are located on remote lands. Life is hard. Resources are scarce. Our Indian kids need a fair chance at education. At Cheyenne River, our High School has not had a math teacher for 5 years! We need an Indian reservation road program that actually builds roads. We need repairs when our rivers flood. The BIA should step up.

When Congress considers national Infrastructure, remember Indian country. We need roads, schools, hospitals, administrative buildings, housing, economic development, nursing homes and community centers. We need real solutions for real problems.

We don't need to waste time and \$60 million on Interior Reorganization.