



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

July 10, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations
Room S128, Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

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**RE: SUPPORT FOR AN ANNUAL BUDGET FOR THE OFFICE OF NATIVE AFFAIRS
AND POLICY AT THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION**

Dear Chairman Cochran,

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the largest and oldest representative organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, I respectfully submit this letter encouraging your support to establish a permanent, annual budget for the Federal Communications Commission, Office of Native Affairs and Policy (FCC-ONAP) in the upcoming FY 2016 Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) Appropriations bill. NCAI firmly believes that the existence of FCC-ONAP is critical to ensuring the FCC consults with tribal nations on important telecommunications regulatory issues.

As highlighted by the FCC's recent 2015 Broadband Progress Report, tribal lands continue to remain the most disconnected areas in the nation with 63 percent of residents on tribal lands lacking access to broadband services. The FCC first realized and acknowledged this telecommunications disparity when a 2000 U.S. Census report found that 68 percent of tribal households had access to basic telephone services, while less than 10 percent of residents on tribal lands had access to terrestrial Internet services. The telecommunications landscape has since advanced to include high-speed broadband services, but the disparities in accessing these vital services on tribal lands still persist.

In light of these historically low access rates, FCC-ONAP was created by the Commission in 2010 for the sole purpose of developing and driving a tribal agenda at the FCC. However, once the office was established it wasn't provided with a dedicated annual budget at the FCC. Initially FCC-ONAP drew funds from the Commission's overall travel budget to host its regional consultations, trainings, and workshops in Indian Country. The lack of a dedicated, annual budget for the office became apparent once sequestration was triggered in 2013. FCC-ONAP was effectively zeroed out and many of the important telecommunications issues being considered by the Commission were not afforded vital tribal input.

NCAI is requesting support for the insertion of language in the FSGG Appropriations bill to include an appropriation of \$500,000 in the FCC's budget specifically for tribal consultation purposes. Without specific funds for tribal consultation, Indian Country will not receive appropriate and much needed consideration in the Commission's regulatory processes. As the nation continues its shift toward next generation broadband technologies and as the FCC continues to initiate rulemakings to support the deployment of these services, the

telecommunications disparities on tribal lands will only increase if proper consultation and inclusion is not pursued and preserved at the Commission.

I am hopeful that you will join us in supporting an appropriation of \$500,000 in the FSGG bill to be used specifically for tribal consultation purposes at the Commission. FCC-ONAP must be empowered to continue its mission of bridging the Digital Divide on tribal lands so that tribal self-determination can be exercised in the Digital Age to create new opportunities for our future generations. If you have any questions please contact NCAI Legislative Associate, Brian Howard, at bhoward@ncai.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brian Cladoosby". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Brian Cladoosby
President
National Congress of American Indians