



National Native Organizations Unite and Urge the President and Congress to Re-Open the Government

WASHINGTON, D.C. | On the 20th day of the government shutdown, eight national Native organizations are jointly urging the President and Congress to immediately end the partial government shutdown, which breaks the treaty and trust obligations the federal government owes to tribal nations. The organizations jointly sent a letter to Congress and the President outlining the wide-ranging impacts of the shutdown on Indian Country.

America's longstanding, legally-mandated obligations to tribal nations should be honored no matter the political quarrels of the moment. "During this shutdown, Congress and the President are putting the well-being of our tribal nations and our citizens in jeopardy. As governmental leaders, we know that it is simply not an option to stop serving our citizens. On behalf of Indian Country, we urge the President and Congress to do their jobs and reopen the government immediately," said National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) President Jefferson Keel.

On tribal lands, the federal government assumed the responsibility to provide basic governmental services like health care, public safety, and education as a part of its treaty negotiations with tribal nations. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and the Indian Health Service (IHS), the primary agencies responsible for providing these services, either directly or through compact and contracts with tribal governments, are both currently hamstrung by the shutdown. The shutdown has a range of impacts throughout Indian Country:

Health

"Unrelated political battles are abrogating the treaties and agreements signed by our ancestors, curtailing health care programs, and causing our people to suffer. When possible, tribal governments are cutting other services and scraping together scarce dollars to keep health clinics operational, but this is not sustainable. The shutdown is destabilizing Native health delivery and health care provider access; as well as destabilizing Tribal Governments, families, children and individuals. Services will be cut, and loss of life will be the result if this shutdown is not ended soon," said National Indian Health Board (NIHB) Chief Executive Officer Stacy A. Bohlen.

"Urban Indian Health Programs (UIHPs) are an integral part of the health care delivery system for Native peoples. These UIHPs depend on funding from IHS to provide care to urban Native people. However, when IHS is shutdown, we do not receive critical funding and the detrimental impacts on our patients are immediate and significant. Medical staff layoffs, reduction in health services provided, and clinic closure will follow if funding is not restored," said National Council on Urban Indian Health (NCUIH) President Maureen Rosette.

Education

“This shutdown jeopardizes the future of thousands of Native students and creates undue immediate hardship for BIE systems to ensure the safety of Native students and support nutrition programs that feed the minds of tomorrow. Creating safe and positive learning environments for our Native children and youth to thrive is a priority for Native communities. The price of this shutdown must not be paid by our children. NIEA urges the President and Congress to re-open the government immediately,” said National Indian Education Association (NIEA) President Robin Butterfield.

Housing

“Tribal housing programs rely on federal funding to fulfill the United States’ trust and treaty responsibilities, so a prolonged shutdown will only limit a tribal nation’s ability to provide housing opportunities in their communities. Some programs may shut down entirely until new funding is available, while others may be able to stretch out their dollars by providing minimal services to their members. Many tribal members are unable to attain the dream of homeownership because their Section 184 loan is unable to be closed. With the BIA included in the shutdown, leases cannot be approved for rehabilitation work on homes or title reports for home loans,” said National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) Chairman Gary Cooper.

Child Welfare

“Native children and families are feeling the effect of the partial government shutdown. Children who are involved in the child welfare system, particularly children in foster care, are significantly impacted. Without funds for the tribal programs that support Native children and families, it is difficult for tribal child welfare workers to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens receive the supports they need outside of our tribal services,” said National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) President Gil Vigil.

Economic Development

“The federal government shutdown puts many of our economic development plans and activities in jeopardy as federal agencies must review and approve permits and other documents before tribal governments can proceed with their planned activities. The effects of delayed or lost economic development opportunities will be felt by tribal governments and their citizens long after the government reopens,” said Self-Governance Communication & Education (SGCE) Chairman W. Ron Allen.

“The government shutdown hurts more than just federal employees- it impacts local economies, small businesses, and the contractors who work tirelessly side by side with federal employees to help federal agencies accomplish the work. We call for an end to the shutdown and would like to see all federal contractors who have been impacted restored in the same manner as federal employees. Small businesses cannot afford to absorb the economic cost and impacts of a government shutdown,” said Kimberly Teehee, President, Native American Contractors Association

Tribal nations are resilient and provide services to around 2 million people; however, we cannot continue to provide for our communities without our federal partners. The long-term effects of this shutdown will ripple throughout our communities for months or even years following the reopening of the government. We urge the President and Congress to end this government stalemate, fulfill their trust and treaty promises to tribal nations, and invest in the future of all Americans.

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