

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2009

The Honorable Herb Kohl
Chairman
Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, and Related Agencies
SD-129
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Sam Brownback
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, and Related Agencies
SD-129
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Senator Brownback:

We are writing to express our appreciation to the subcommittee for including for the past ten years a set-aside in USDA's Rural Development accounts for projects in American Indian communities. We are particularly grateful that you provided about \$24 million to continue these programs in fiscal year 2009. We respectfully request a modest increase in the set-aside to \$25 million for FY 2010.

Combined with other public and private resources, these funds have supported much-needed projects to build and equip tribal college facilities; start up and expand small businesses; and install and improve drinking water and wastewater treatment facilities.

We respectfully request that in your FY 2010 bill you continue to support more community development work on tribal reservations, at funding levels as high as possible above the FY 2009 level. Specifically, we propose the following allocation:

- \$16 million for drinking water and waste disposal grants in Rural Utilities;
- \$5 million for Rural Community Facilities grants for tribal college buildings and equipment;
- \$4 million for Rural Business Programs.

We appreciate the pressing budgetary limitations the subcommittee faces again this year; however, we believe all three of these Rural Development funding programs are well targeted to support the work of community builders on distressed American Indian reservations. The drinking water and wastewater treatment systems that tribes have been gradually expanding and improving are basic building blocks of progress toward improving overall quality of life, public health, education, job creation and more.

Tribal colleges offer hope to people living in challenging circumstances and remote places. Although few of them even existed before 1970, as a group they are building strong remedial, vocational and academic curricula for students – the majority of them parents in their late 20s and early 30s with young children – who previously had no opportunity to learn job skills and move beyond welfare dependency. Some students train for essential occupations on

and near their reservations – nurses, teachers’ aides, welders, environmental technicians, etc. while others prepare for further studies. Virtually all the colleges continue to be housed in sub-standard facilities. By also leveraging funds from individuals, foundations and corporations, tribal colleges are making real progress in rebuilding and improving old, and in some cases building new, campuses.


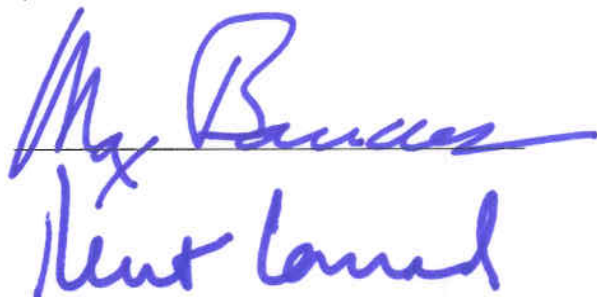
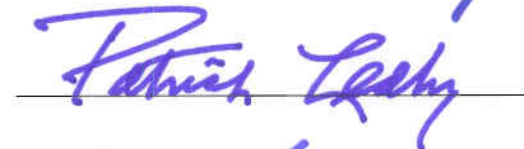

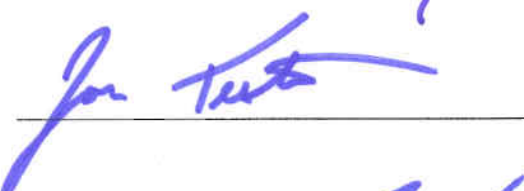
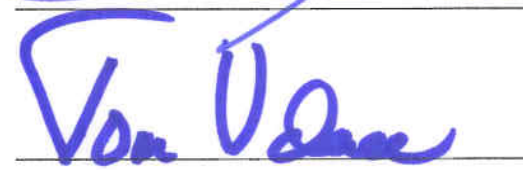

Finally, several of the nation’s poorest tribes have successfully used funding from the USDA-RD business program set-aside to produce feasibility and marketing plans, open small business development counseling centers and assist start-ups and expansions with low interest loans and grants for equipment, working capital and construction. The set-aside is one of the few sources available for enterprise development on reservations.

Again, we greatly appreciate the subcommittee’s past support for the tribal set-aside and thank you for your consideration of our request for FY 2010. A modest increase to the current \$24 million funding level still represents a very small portion of the total annual appropriation for Rural Development; however, we know it will continue to make an enormous difference for some of the nation’s most economically distressed communities.

Thank you for your consideration of our request.

We each certify that neither we nor our immediate families have a pecuniary interest in the congressionally directed spending items we are requesting in this letter, consistent with the requirements of paragraph 9 of Rule XLIV of the Standing Rules of the Senate.

Sincerely,

 Byron L. Dwyer	 Kent Conrad
 Patrick Leahy	 Jim Johnson
 Jon Tester	 Von Vohse
 Maria Cantwell	