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## MacDonald LoneTree Testifies on Need for New Navajo Nation Jails

*Criminals are merely receiving "get- out-of-jail-free" cards*

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Hope MacDonald Lone Tree, Chairperson of the Public Safety Committee of the Navajo Nation, testified to a Congressional Committee on Tuesday, April 24 that the Navajo Nation is experiencing a public safety meltdown due to deteriorating detention facilities.

"Perpetrators of domestic violence, DUI, child sexual abuse, battery and other crimes are released before finishing their sentences because we have no jail space," MacDonald Lone Tree said this week in testimony to before the House Appropriations Commerce, Justice and Science Subcommittee, which provides funding for the Department of Justice. Subcommittee members invited Chairperson MacDonald Lone Tree to provide views of the Navajo Nation on the President's budget request for the Department of Justice for Fiscal Year 2008.

The Navajo Nation has a population of more than 300,000 spread over an area larger than the state of West Virginia, but, no new adult jails have been built on the reservation since 1957.

MacDonald Lone Tree told lawmakers that, "because of unsafe conditions, prisoners can only be kept overnight in three of our six adult detention facilities."

This public safety meltdown is only worsening, MacDonald Lonetree told the subcommittee, due to last week's closure of the Chinle facility. Only 59 available jail beds are now available in Navajo Nation. The shortage of jail beds is so dire, that, since Dec. 1, 2006, 1,163 individuals were booked into the Tuba City facility, but only nine are currently serving time.

MacDonald Lone Tree also testified last week to the House Interior Subcommittee, which has jurisdiction over funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. MacDonald Lone Tree explained to the Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee that, "it is important to note that while BIA provides funding for detention personnel and for repairs on BIA-owned facilities, only the Department of Justice provides funding to build new jails in Indian Country."

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MacDonald Lone Tree urged the Subcommittee to provide \$50 million for the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands Program in Fiscal Year 2008.

The Navajo Nation has recognized the lack of detention facilities as a paramount priority, and recently enacted a 1 percent sales tax dedicated for judicial/public safety facilities despite the challenging economic conditions on the Navajo Nation.

MacDonald Lone Tree expressed opposition to the President's Fiscal Year 2008 budget proposal to combine more than 70 programs into four new, block grants for state, local and tribal governments.

"The consolidation proposal eliminates several programs important to Indian Tribes, and provides no indication that Indian programs will receive a fair portion of the broad and undefined block grants," MacDonald LoneTree said.

"Indian Tribes have enough difficulty receiving funding for Indian specific programs. Competing for grants against California and New York City will not help our chances," she said. "Therefore, the Navajo Nation urges the Subcommittee to reject the Administration's plan to combine all Indian Country grant programs into larger block grants, and most importantly, we urge this Subcommittee to provide \$50 million for the Correctional Facilities on Tribal Lands Program in Fiscal Year 2008."

Subcommittee members recognize the difficult situation facing the Navajo Nation and pledged to check into the situation further. MacDonald Lone Tree and the other members of the Public Safety Committee will continue to educate the members of Congress about the great need for new detention facilities in the Navajo Nation.

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