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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

MacDonald LoneTree Testifies to Congress on Detention Facility Crisis

Lack of Prison Space Has Created a Law Enforcement Meltdown

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Hope MacDonald Lone Tree, chair of the Public Safety Committee of the Navajo Nation, testified Wednesday, April 18 to a Congressional Committee that the closure of the Chinle Detention Facility has worsened an already dangerous lack of detention facilities on the Navajo Nation.

"With only 59 prison beds in the entire Navajo Nation and more than 44,000 arrests per year, criminals are only serving a portion of their sentences," MacDonald Lone Tree said this week in testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, which provides funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Subcommittee members invited Chairwoman MacDonald Lone Tree (Coal Mine Canyon/Toh Nanees dizi) to testify on the President's budget request for the BIA for fiscal year 2008.

MacDonald Lone Tree said that the situation is so dire, that, "perpetrators of domestic violence, DUI, reckless driving, child sexual abuse, battery and other crimes are released before finishing their sentences. Instead of making arrests, the Navajo police are forced to cite and release offenders. Criminals are merely receiving 'get-out-of-jail-free' cards."

MacDonald Lone Tree explained to the subcommittee that, "just last week, a man was arrested for domestic violence, placed in the Chinle jail, but was released because of overcrowding."

"He immediately returned home and beat his wife so severely that she was flown to a hospital in the Phoenix area," she said. "Unbelievably, her husband who battered her on two different occasions has been released again. This is unconscionable situation that must be fixed immediately."

MacDonald Lone Tree told the federal officials that, "Congress must restore federal funding for prison construction in this year's budget and immediately address the crisis facing the Navajo Nation."

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Delores Greyeyes, the Director of the Navajo Corrections Department, traveled to Washington with MacDonald Lone Tree to further educate the BIA, the Department of Justice and members of Congress about the crisis resulting from the shut down of the Chinle and Tuba City facilities.

MacDonald Lone Tree explained that, “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 impoverished conditions on the Navajo Nation.”

“We have raised our own taxes to address this vital issue,” MacDonald Lone Tree said. “It is time for the federal government to fulfill its trust responsibility and join us in providing funding for new detention facilities.”

MacDonald Lone Tree concluded her testimony by stating that, “the detention facilities in the Navajo Nation aren’t fit to house humans.”

“Congress must direct the BIA to ensure adequate jails with sufficient staffing are built on the Navajo Nation and in Indian Country,” she said.

In meetings on Capitol Hill, MacDonald Lone Tree expressed her gratitude to Rep. Rick Renzi (R-Ariz.) and Sen. John Kyl (R-Ariz.) for their excellent work in seeking emergency assistance for the detention facility crisis in the Navajo Nation

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