

**THERESA TWO BULLS
PRESIDENT, OGLALA SIOUX TRIBE
TESTIMONY BEFORE
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
And
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING and
URBAN AFFAIRS**

FIELD HEARING

**AUGUST 25, 2010
RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA**

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ON
INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO ADDRESSING
HOUSING NEEDS IN OUR INDIAN COUNTRY

TESTIMONY**

Chairman Johnson, I Theresa Two Bulls, President of the Oglala, appear before you at this hearing on behalf of the Oglala Sioux Lakota Tribe. Before I proceed further I want to thank you personally for all the support and assistance that you have provided for tribal housing over the years. Your attention and contributions have been enormous and your presence here today is evidence your continued commitment to assisting tribes in addressing our Indian housing needs.

It will be fifty years ago next month that candidate John F. Kennedy announced during his campaign for the U.S. presidency, that he would, if elected, expand the federal public housing program to American Indian tribes. Less than a year later, after his election, the Oglala Sioux Tribal Council created the first Indian housing authority in the United States and President Kennedy, public housing administrators, Oglala tribal attorney Richard Shifter, and then Tribal President Johnson Holy Rock gathered in the White House oval office to sign documents providing the first Indian housing funding in the country to The Oglala Sioux Housing Authority.

I would like to take a moment, if I may, to recognize in the audience today the presence of Mr. Johnson Holy Rock. President Holy Rock was in 1960 - and is still today - a powerful and

straight talking advocate for tribes and tribal housing and we all owe him deep gratitude for his important contributions to Indian housing. Members of this Committee, President Johnson Holy Rock. [President Holy Rock stands.]

In the past fifty years, through both the Public Housing tribal Program and now the HUD Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act Program (NAHASDA), federal assistance has helped build and modernize over a hundred thousand Indian housing units throughout the United States, including 2,500 new units and thousands of modernizations at Pine Ridge. Some of that original housing, including the very first Indian housing units in the country, lies just 80 miles south of where we sit today, still standing and providing a valuable housing resource for our people.

Though our Tribe appreciates the assistance that has been provided by the federal government, I must state, on behalf of my Tribe and my tribal members, that the level of federal assistance has been wholly inadequate. Your assistance, I am afraid, has not satisfied the treaty and trust responsibilities or obligations of the United States government nor has it resulted in a majority of our low-income tribal members living in decent, safe and affordable housing.

Furthermore, our tribal members now have to compete in 2010 with over 450 tribes (an increase in excess of twice the number of recipients in 1996) for a piece of the meager NAHASDA funding pie, which in real value has actually decreased in value in the fifteen years since the federal NAHASDA Housing program was created by Congress. Instead of housing conditions improving for our low income tribal members, they have sadly grown worse over the past five

decades since Presidents Johnson Holy Rock and John F. Kennedy gathered in the White House to herald the beginning of federal assistance for Indian housing.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe does thank The Senate Indian Affairs Committee and the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee for holding today's hearing in the Dakotas. We welcome your interest in 1) better understanding of our needs, 2) addressing the often hidden overcrowding that certainly occurs in Indian housing in the Northern Plains, and 3) learning how successful our tribes have been effective in spending American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.

However, I must say, in recent years, the enormous needs of large, land based tribes like Oglala Sioux have been marginalized. In comparison to national housing, and frankly to many other tribes as well, we and many other, land based tribes, remain the poorest in the United States. Our brave and patriotic tribal members deserve better and we ask for more help.

We simply need more funding and we believe, it is appropriate and wise that such additional funding be provided to only those tribes with the worst housing conditions and then only if they can demonstrate a capacity to effectively spend such funding.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe and Oglala Sioux (Lakota) Housing offer to work with Congress, HUD and national tribal associations to try to develop this new program under NAHASDA, but the funding for this new initiative should, in our judgment, be in addition to current funding for the existing NAHASDA Indian Housing Block Grants Program.

As you may be aware, Oglala Sioux and many other large, land based tribes are banding together under a new advocacy group known as *A Coalition for Indian Housing* to try to more effectively advocate for some of our particular needs and interests in Indian housing. I hope that these committees will now begin to work with this group to find new solutions, improving housing conditions on reservations.

Thank you, Senator Johnson, again and we are grateful to your Committees for coming to Indian country to better understand both our needs and our successes. With your permission, I would like to reserve the right to provide additional testimony in the next week.

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