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**June 23, 2022**

**Testimony of the Little Wound School  
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Republicans  
and the Committee on Energy and Commerce Republican Oversight Forum titled,  
“Skyrocketing Energy Costs are Hurting Americans.”**

Ranking member Westerman, Ranking member Rodgers, and Representative Johnson thank you for inviting me to address the importance of the skyrocketing energy cost today. My name is Charles Cuny, and I am the School Superintendent for the Little Wound School, located on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

P.L. 100-297 tribally controlled grant schools, like ours, are facing the critical problem of trying to operate at or above federal and state-mandated education standards with severely insufficient federal funding. We receive more than 90% of our funding from federally appropriated sources to serve more than 850 Lakota students. While our federally funding has been historically inadequate and expenditures severely restricted, we now face historic inflation with rising operations costs we cannot negotiate or default on.

In South Dakota, and the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, according to AAA, the statewide average cost for gas from June 2021 to June 2022 has risen 61%<sup>1</sup> from \$2.94 to \$4.76, and diesel from \$3.12 to \$5.39. Propane is up 35% from \$97.64 to \$132.06<sup>2</sup>, and from March 29, 2021, to March 29, 2022, Heating Oil is up a whopping 109% from \$2.06 to \$4.31<sup>3</sup>.

Consider that to transport more than 850 Lakota students; we have twelve bus routes driving more than 240 miles each, per day, 2,880 miles. As you can guess, our fuel costs have increased exponentially, and we haven't even considered the cost of heating our 60-year-old school building in the frigid South Dakota winters. Unfortunately, to accommodate the tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> Source: AAA, State Gas Price Averages, <https://gasprices.aaa.com/?state=SD>

<sup>2</sup> Source: SDDOT, Fuel Price Index, June 22, 2022, <https://dot.sd.gov/doing-business/contractors/fuel-price-index>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Weekly South Dakota Heating Oil Wholesale/Retail Price, June 22, 2022, [https://ycharts.com/indicators/south\\_dakota\\_residential\\_heating\\_oil\\_price](https://ycharts.com/indicators/south_dakota_residential_heating_oil_price).

inflation of fuel and utility costs, our only available source to pay for these increases due to federal restrictions is to cut into the student education funding.

I have been in education for over 20 years, and it breaks my heart to cut into the already underfunded student education allocations. For example, according to the Department of Education FY 2022, our Lakota students were funded at less than 50%, \$6,048 of the funds expended to educate non-Indian students at 12,500.

This is why we need your support to increase Indian Education funding and fully fund Operation & Maintenance (Fuel and utilities) expenses. Even though fully funding for O&M was mandated in 1981 by 25 C.F.R. § 39.1203, Congress has never fully funded these critical expenses.

We want to remind Congress that these tribally controlled schools are federally built and owned buildings that tribes operate on behalf of the Federal government's trust responsibility to tribes. Our requests are not drastic. We simply ask that Congress appropriate the necessary funds to pay the actual operating cost of tribal schools so that Indian students' education funds are not unnecessarily reduced to pay for the rising cost of fuel and utilities.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to any questions you may have.

Charles Cuny  
Superintendent, Little Wound School  
Pine Ridge Indian Reservation