



Lower Sioux Indian Community in the State of Minnesota

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Cansayapi Otunwe

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF ROBERT L. LARSEN, COMMUNITY COUNCIL
PRESIDENT
LOWER SIOUX INDIAN COMMUNITY
BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
FIELD HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON:
*“Investing in Native Communities: Transformative Opportunities in the Infrastructure
Investment and Jobs Act”***

June 28, 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon, Chair Schatz, Vice Chair Murkowski, members of the Committee and honored guests. My name is Robert “Deuce” Larsen and it is my honor and privilege to serve as President of the Lower Sioux Indian Community in the State of Minnesota. Thank you for allowing me to give my Community a voice before the United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs to discuss Investing in Native Communities: Transformative Opportunities in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

II. LOWER SIOUX INDIAN COMMITTEE IN THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

The Lower Sioux Indian Community is a sovereign and federally recognized tribe in southwestern Minnesota, or Mni Sota Makoce, the original homelands of the Dakota people. The Lower Sioux Indian Community is part of the Bdewakanton Band of Dakota. Our name for this region is Cansayapi, which means “where they mark the trees red.” Pride in our history and our culture are the heart and spirit of everything we do.

Despite various federal laws and policy that have aimed to extinguish our people (with some still on the books to this day), our citizenship is thriving. Lower Sioux experienced a 70% growth since 2000, with over one-third of our citizens under 18 and almost half under 50. We thrive despite being exiled on our own homelands - homelands that pre-date the establishment of the United States. Our people risked death to continue to live here, and the fact we are still here, and flourishing, is testament to the strength of our ancestors and the Dakota people.

We aim to ensure our people grow, adapt, and innovate together, through opportunities that span the generations. Our goal as leadership for Cansayapi is to always think and act while keeping in mind the next several generations. We are encouraged that this Act supports specific infrastructure needs and is a tangible example of federal trust responsibility to tribal nations.

This legislation helps support our Community as we continue to thrive with our goals of improving infrastructure. The programs and opportunities with this legislation creates programs that will directly benefit the Lower Sioux Indian Community. Cansayapi intends to use available funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to support our endeavors to strengthen sustainability, notably in the areas of broadband and wastewater treatment.

III. REGARDING BROADBAND:

When our Community was shut down due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, we, like many governments, communities and businesses became more reliant on the internet to continue operations. Having reliable high-speed internet is critical for our continued growth. Our local broadband company self-identifies as providing available, reliable coverage, but in reality, that is not the case.

At present, the Community has developed broadband fiber installation plans to improve connectivity for the Community’s citizens living in the tribal community. Our goal is that all Community citizens living on the Reservation will have access to high quality, reliable internet service. After completing a feasibility study in the Summer of 2020, our hope is to ultimately have fiber broadband installed and operational. We were pleased to see the commitment to grants that can be used to expand access to and the adoption of broadband service on tribal land or remote learning, telework, or telehealth services and does not limit such expanded access to the COVID-19 pandemic. This effort can also assist with insuring connectivity to future housing expansion. We struggle with inadequate housing, which last estimated is to be 87 units short of the Community’s need. With our efforts to build stronger broadband services on our small land base, we need to ensure that future development does not create inequity in accessing reliable broadband.

IV. REGARDING WASTEWATER TREATMENT:

As our population grows, we have discovered our current wastewater treatment facility cannot accommodate our needs much longer. It is critical that the Community builds a new wastewater treatment facility. This legislation invests \$6 billion dollars to support water infrastructure in Tribal communities, including \$3.5 billion over five years for the Indian Health Service Sanitation Facilities Construction program. To us, water is sacred, a life-giver and vital to our growing Community. The interconnectedness of our people and the waters of our nation are tantamount to our identity and plays a key role in our cultural traditions.

We currently have a small project that would allow construction of individual sanitation facilities for three new and other category homes, but as I mentioned previously, our Community is in need of an additional 87 homes all of which would require access to adequate sanitation

facilities. With our growing population, the demand will only continue to rise. These systems are costly but are critical to ensure safe living conditions for the health and welfare of our citizens and to prevent overcrowding in homes, which often can inundate existing systems.

V. REGARDING TRANSPORTATION:

Review of the Act provides significant opportunities for transportation infrastructure. We are especially interested in road maintenance, preventative safety measures and transportation facilities. The Act provides ways to incorporate tribal interests at the forefront with the addition of key positions in government. Moreover, the Act recognizes that tribes and its leaders need to be consulted and part of decision making for activities in their lands.

VI. CLOSING STATEMENT:

Funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law supports the Community’s sustainability efforts and supports Cansayapi’s official Vision that “the Lower Sioux Indian Community is a healthy, safe, and happy community – grounded and guided by Dakota culture, traditions, and language – where every person contributes to a diversified social and economic life. The people grow, adapt, and innovate together, through opportunities that span the generations and seek continuous success.”

Out of respect for the Committee’s time during oral testimony, we included more information on potential funding opportunities the Community plans to seek to support vital infrastructure-related endeavors. The number of funding opportunities and the amount of infrastructure that can be funded through the Act is unprecedented. This law will bring jobs and with that economic development and security into our Community. This Act represents a tremendous amount of opportunity for the Community. Vast opportunities are available, so the need for technical assistance with these programs will be high. The Community is also interested in many areas in the Act, such as cyber security, energy efficiency and research.

We are appreciative of every member of Congress who supported this bill. The Community also thanks Sen. Smith’s office for keeping us apprised and for providing more information about the many funding opportunities that come from this historic law. The Community also thanks Chairman Schatz and the entire Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for the invitation to testify before you today.

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