

ACL Tribal Consultation on Implementation of Older Americans Act Regulations Transcript

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: All right, let's formally begin our consultation. Go ahead, Melissa, with your-- you want to do your spiel of explaining? Yeah, I want you to do all that. That's why I pay you. Okay. At these tribal consultations, we follow what are called FACA rules. And I don't know what FACA stands for-- Federal Advisory Council Act.

MELISSA SZASZ: Yeah--

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Federal Advisory Council Act, FACA, and it's really, really important because really, really big meetings, like when STAC-- when we meet with tribal leadership, only the tribal chairman gets to sit at the table and only our Alison gets sit at the table. That's FACA, and those are the only people that get to speak unless one of them delegates. I mean, it's all kinds of stuff. So we have to follow in these formal tribal consultations-- don't laugh at me! At these formal consultations, we have to also follow FACA rules.

Those FACA rules say that we advertise these events in time. They say that we have a consultation policy with tribal leaders. We consult with nation to nations. So feds consult with tribal leaders. And so we ask for elected tribal officials, the chairs, to speak first. After the chairs are all done or they have nothing to say, other elected officials have the floor next. Once those folks are done, then if the tribal leaders have appointed anyone to speak on their behalf, we run with them. And then we come down to real people.

Not that tribal leaders aren't real people, but we come down to folks like you who are our program managers. If you are an elected tribal official, and I know there are two in this room at least, maybe there's three-- Sara, is your governor still with-- yes, governor. Okay, there are three I know elected tribal officials in this room. You do not have to speak. If you would like to speak, we would love to hear your thoughts about your own programs, about these questions.

And remember, we've changed the rules a little bit. Do you think changing the rules is going to make it easier? How do you need- how do you need our help to get to number 10 on the-- on this list here. Edwin Walker, anything else I'm supposed to-- Edwin usually does this part, but he's leaving, so he's letting me do it all by myself. All right, go ahead, Melissa. Wilson Wewa?

MELISSA SZASZ: All right.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Are you asking to speak, Mr. Wewa? All right, Wilson Wewa, Warm Springs Tribes in Oregon. And, Wilson, do we have your permission to record this?

WILSON WEWA: Go ahead. I'm going to blast you guys.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you. (Chuckles)

WILSON WEWA: No. (Chuckles) Again, I'm Wilson Wewa. I'm with the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs. I'm serving my third three-year term on our tribal council. One of the things that

I don't see happening that I think needs to happen, as you are aware, we have-- in the Northwest, we have the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Organization that is always attended by all the tribal council leaders from the northwest.

I think their organization, Inter Tribal Council of Arizona, that the tribal leaders are a part of. You have the All Pueblo Councils that are with their tribal leaders and everything. But I don't think, and I've never heard, and you guys can correct me if I'm wrong, but the administrative-- Administration on Aging has never gone to where our tribal leaders are at. Never. And I think you guys need to go where the tribal leaders are at.

I'm also a Title VI director. I've been in Title VI for 43 years. We make the decisions as directors, as supervisors, as program managers for the daily operation of Title VI. We're responsible for coordinating with Title III programs. And we're responsible for making reports to our tribal councils. But if you're talking about federal tribal consultation and you're talking about federal tribal consultation with our tribal council leaders, then the administration on aging needs to go to every one of those regional specific areas where tribal leaders meet, actual tribal council chairmen, tribal council leaders from their different districts.

I shouldn't be tasked with having to try to teach them about rules, regulations, and policies because I already-- I do it anyway because I play that dual role, but I think there is a government-to-government relationship between the federal government and the states that need-- that void needs to be filled by you guys.

It can't be filled by me as a director because sometimes, even though I've been there for 40 years and I'm doing a good job, that's why I'm still there, it doesn't hold the same weight as if Edwin came or Cynthia came or somebody from the federal government came in the true consultation manner to talk to our tribal leaders. So I'm saying take your dog and pony show to our tribal leaders. Don't ram it down the Title VI directors' throats and expect us to go do your job. You guys do your job too. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Wilson. Thank you, Mr. Wewa. Edwin Walker?

EDWIN WALKER: Thank you, Wilson. It's great to see you. And my response, even though with regard to tribal consultation we are really hearing you, we're going to take this opportunity to simply explain where we are. As Alison Barkoff mentioned this morning, we are finalizing the ACL Tribal Consultation Policy. Along with that, we have a request that the President has endorsed and is in his FY25 budget to fund us to even begin to implement tribal consultation at ACL. It's not something we have really done before.

We used to sort of ride on the coattails of HHS because we were such a small operating division within the department. We do participate in the department's budget consultation as well as regional tribal consultation as much as we can. But for ACL it has been and it will continue to be a budgetary constraint. And I can say this because I'm leaving, Cynthia would like to go lots of places in Indian Country. She wants to take everybody out so that they can honestly see what the needs are, but we simply don't have that kind of budget. It gets down to a dollars and cents issue.

So thank you for the comment. We hear you. We totally understand. We've heard it before. It's something the STAC raises with us as well. And so we are doing the best we can.

And we do use other forums to ensure that we are hearing from tribal leaders and- and others who are delegates of tribal leaders to bring us the message. But thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Edwin. And yes, Wilson, it is-- we are a very poor little agency. And I want to remind all of you in Title VI that when Congress allocates money for Title VI, it's for meals. We do not have a single penny allocated by Congress to administer Title VI. The dollars all go out to you folks to feed those elders. Next elected tribal official.

MELISSA SZASZ: We have Anthony Ortiz from Pueblo San Felipe. And do you give Teya permission to record this and to provide the testimony?

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Melissa.

ANTHONY ORTIZ: Thank you. Yes. Thank you. And with all due respect before I start going off on my prepared statement here, I would like to do a little prayer in my language here. [Speaks Native language] Thank you. So, as I had introduced myself earlier, I'm Anthony Ortiz and I'm the Governor from Pueblo San Felipe in New Mexico. And I am also a lifetime councilman, which allows me to continue to be involved in and educated on matters, concerns, and issues related to elder services programming.

It is an honor to stand before you all today to speak on behalf of the elders with our community. While we do our best to advocate for our own, we're often also speaking for others-- other elders who reside within the 19 pueblos in New Mexico who have similar struggles and challenges, but don't really have the advocacy available. I would like for you to understand that, as an appointed governor, we do not ask to be elected into the office roles we serve in leading our communities.

There are, however, some pueblos in New Mexico who do whole elections for their governors and their other tribal leadership roles. And as Miss Barkoff saw in her visit to our community back in September of 2022, we are one of the more conservative pueblos and still practice many of our traditional customs and [unintelligible] following the traditional calendar. Everyone here today is here to honor their elders by speaking and representing them by carrying their message of hope and resilience.

Our elders were once providers and caregivers who taught us how to grow in knowledge, strength, and compassion. They are the gatekeepers of our culture and tradition. And it is because of them that we are who we are. Even as tribal leaders, we look to them for guidance and wisdom as they have the life experience and ancestral knowledge of all who came from before them.

I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak before you to hopefully share with you and help you understand why we believe our elders are our most precious treasure and deserving of not only love and respect, but to live life comfortably and safely within their own communities. Because this is where their roots are deeply embedded and their valuable contributions continue to shape our future.

As many of you who have made time to come to our communities to visit with our people, our programs, and our culture, it is my hope that you have gained the insight and understanding that it is that very same culture and tradition that is gifted to us by our elders

that is the very foundation on which we have built our programs. As we come together for our elders, we all share a common goal, but it's at the local, state, or federal level that goal has been keeping our elders safe and healthy in our communities.

We want to ensure that they receive optimal services and support which will allow them to age in place, a place that they've known all their lives, a place that is familiar, where they can continue to thrive and make valuable contributions. However, in order for us to continue the successful-- we need to have the same understanding of the needs and an open means of communication which ensures that we are successful at the goals we are trying to achieve for our Native American elders.

The onset of the pandemic brought so much suffering, hardship, and loss throughout the world. Our Native elders and families suffered tremendously and are still feeling many of the negative impacts today. The prolonged isolation resulted in negative physical, mental, and social declines and increased stress, anxiety, and depression. As some elders and their families begin focusing on their health as a result of being affected by COVID, the impacts have been far greater, such as new diagnosis of cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, etcetera.

And because of the lack of accessing quality healthcare resources, and especially specialty clinics off the reservation, our elders and their families are at high risk of poor outcomes of those suffering with these chronic health diseases. Each year in these settings, we do our best to provide you testimony on the needs, challenges, and obstacles we face in serving our beloved elders. Before I proceed, I ask that you take a moment to reflect within yourselves the difficulties and challenges that you and your families have faced as you recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

For us, in our pueblo communities and across Native country, the pandemic has intensified many of the disparities and inequalities that exist in our communities. The cost of living is a high-- all high time. Many families are struggling to make ends meet and therefore relying more on programs to meet their needs. Goods and services are harder to obtain because of increasing cost. Staff are leaving jobs that they love, not because they want to, but because they can't afford to stay.

As you sit before me today, I would like for you to consider the following. Number one, the Nutrition Services Incentive Program, funding for commodities are provided to serve elders with congregate and home-delivered meals. With the increase of food costs, it has become increasingly difficult and challenging to provide this necessary service to our clients. It is imperative that you consider an increase in funding to support the increase in cost so that we may continue providing nutrition services to our clients. Many of our elders rely on the program for a hot meal that they may otherwise not receive.

Number two, in addition to the food cost increasing, the cost of living has increased as well. What that means is that we are losing staff to higher paying jobs. We do not leave because-- they do not leave because they want to, it's because they have to. We cannot afford to be competitive to be able to retain staff and most come to a sad realization that they have to move on to survive. We're asking for an increase in funding to support competitive salaries and wages to retain the committed, compassionate, and empathetic individuals who provide the love and care for elders.

Number three, considering reducing the age eligibility from 60 to 55 under the Older Americans Act. Currently, pueblos, tribes, and nations are allowed to establish the age eligibility

to receive services in their respective communities through the resolution process, but we do not receive funding for those under 60. By reducing the age eligibility to 55, it will lessen the gap between the established age under the Older Americans Act and the age eligibility that pueblos, tribes, and nations establish.

What we have seen over the years, and this due to chronic disease and other health disparities, our elders are now requiring services and supports such as younger age and by implementing intervention measures and offering supports such as nutrition education, physical fitness and recreation activities, and mental health support as opposed to just focusing on prevention measures, we are helping our elders live longer.

Number four, improve oversight of funding provided to states and ensure that their policies and processes do not impede on tribal sovereignty while allowing equitable access to much needed resources. While we have overcome the obstacle of access, we are still faced with the challenge of cumbersome process which many programs do not have the capacity or resources which will allow for the completion and submittal of an application.

Burdened by imposing the RFP completion and submittal of application-- excuse me-- burdened by imposing the RFP application process, they are forcing pueblos and tribes to compare against each other to access the resources. Number five, while I appreciate all the efforts made with regard to tribal consultation, I would like to ask that we continue to improve upon all the effort already made.

We are always happy to have the opportunity to work together to offer suggestions, input which can create greater outcomes for those we serve. We believe that inclusion, cooperation, and unity alleviate the many barriers created through policy and process and truly bring about the [unintelligible] of participation by our pueblos and service providers with the intent of achieving greater outcomes and possibilities.

Our service providers are very eager to participate and always have the best interest of our elders at heart as they advocate at all levels for policy change and improvements. In this process, it's really important to increase communication and an unprecedented level of transparency, which will allow us to care for elders and provide for expanded resources and opportunities. Our partnership has already begun with our shared intent and concern for our elders.

The care for our elders takes a variety of forms and the care that an elder, their family receives depends on their needs as we seek to be of service to our elders. Rely-- our elders rely on the core values of love, respect, and generosity of all which they gifted us. For many years, we have spoken before you offering testimony on the needs, challenges, and obstacles we face in service delivery, program implementation, and today I ask that we look at this time as time for change and action.

As we forge ahead and continue to learn of the challenges that may lie ahead, the struggles we may encounter and hardship we may endure, the silver lining is having the strength and resilience of our elders to see us through those difficult times but reminding us who we are as pueblo people and that holding true to our culture and beliefs, we will always endure. Thank you.

As I stated earlier-- excuse me-- as I stated earlier, San Felipe is a traditional pueblo. And just to give you a little bit of history of our setting in our pueblo, there are six high positions appointed annually. War chief and the lieutenant war chief, the governor, lieutenant governor,

and the two church officials, the head fiscale and the lieutenant fiscale. They're appointed traditionally for annual-- on annual basis. From there on, when the transition takes place at the end of the year, we automatically become lifetime councilman.

As I am a lifetime councilman, first time I was appointed into an office traditionally, I was barely going on my 20th year. And from there on, I was involved politically with these matters and issues. So I'm much aware about things that happen and things that don't happen to continue to serve our people. And, as a tribal leader, as the position that I hold as the governor, I have responsibilities, obligations, duties, almost like a president. I have my own small nation in San Felipe.

I engage in all aspects, whether it be education, elderly, natural resources, water matters, land matters, and everything that pertains to my people. So it is very hard and very stressing to hold this position, so that's why we have departments that oversee the departments that concerns our people, that they serve our people. So with that, I would ask whenever time and at any time, if my directors of whatever department comes to you and asking for assistance, I would appreciate that you give them that assistance.

The director here with the Senior Center Department, Sara Candelaria, is doing a great job. And she has been there, been dedicated giving services to our elders. You know, I can't speak anymore because what they say, you know, words don't complete everything of what else senior centers have in mind because they have a way of giving you the strength and the encouragement and the power for you all to carry on your responsibilities and do this at this level, at the federal level.

Even though being a distance many miles away, but it will still reach you to have that passion from what they do in their prayers, asking for blessings and [unintelligible] strength and get the strength to carry all the responsibilities and duties that you have. Because I know that you don't only serve one pueblo or one state, you all have a big responsibility also. So, with that, early before I started my statement, I asked my creator [unintelligible] to give you the strength and the power and the encouragement to continue on to carry on your responsibilities and your duties. Thank you very much.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: --for that wonderful testimony. I appreciate it very much. Any other elected tribal officials? We have another [unintelligible] in the back.

MELISSA SZASZ: Yes, we have Peter Magdanalera-- or Magdalena.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: --Indian Service Area. So I want to make sure you connect with her.

PETER MADALENA: [Speaks Native language] Good evening, everyone. My name is Peter Madalena, Governor for the Pueblo of Jemez, and I'd like to first of all thank Governor Ortiz from San Felipe for his statement. I do agree with him. And, at this time, I just, on behalf of the Pueblo of Jemez, address this letter to the Older Americans Act of Title VI directors that provide funding services for our tribal elders of our community. Reprioritize our tribal elders because they are the soul of our community.

Without their wisdom and perseverance, we'd not be where we are today. We are rich with culture and traditions and we seek guidance from our elders. And with having the senior

citizens program, we are creating plans on expanding our facility to meet the needs of elders. We encourage you all to visit our center and witness the liveliness and positive energy our elders bring every day. I also, you know, support our program's effort. I've been there. I go there, have lunch with the seniors. I've been doing this for a very long time.

You know, just the wisdom that they have that they carry, the language that they have, the old Towa language that we have now. And that's one of the things that we're trying to do with the seniors and also provide for our school kids, you know, trying to work together with the kids, bring the kids over and, you know, have that collaboration and the communication working with the younger generation. I think that's very important because language is very, very vital to our communities, to our tribes.

Because no language, it's gone, that's it. For us, we're the only Towa-speaking tribe on the planet, on this Mother Earth, and so it's very important that we teach our kids. And where it begins, it's at home. Us as parents or grandparents teach our kids and-- because we do not want to lose our language, and that's where the teaching starts is from home. And I've been saying this for a very long time, I have grandkids and every day I talk my Towa language. And, as a leader, we go to the schools, we have schools that have immersion programs, teach our kids at school.

And, you know, whatever support you can give to our communities, it's going to help our elders and, of course, one of these- one of these days, our younger generations is going to be here with us as seniors. So we need to look, you know, up to what we can provide for our younger generation today. And so, in that, you know, I just support my staff that's here today from Jemez. My brother right here and we have staff, maybe if they can stand up, please. And also I have my-- Isaac Romero, my first lieutenant governor, is also with us here today.

You know, being in this position as governor, like the governor had said, you know, once you're done with governor, then you're tribal council forever. As long as you're able. So, you know, I just appreciate what the governor had said. And thank you, governor, for being here as well. And, you know, just my daughter is the senior manager. She's doing a great job. And the staff are doing a great job here.

And I do so much appreciate what they do for our people back home, especially the seniors. We need them and we need their wisdom. We need their teachings. And so, in that, you know, I just want to say thank you for being here, everyone, and just keep on continuing to work and just move forward. And we look forward to the future to working with you and thank you for your support. And as much as money you can give to us, we would take. Better to provide more services to our people, to our older generation.

And I care for them and like I've been saying since I've been governor-- I was first lieutenant last year. So they bumped me up to governor this year. So, like I say to meetings, wherever I go, I say I'm here for my people. I'm not here for me. So I always say that because I love my people, I care for them, and that's why I'm here. And I just want to thank you and may God bless everyone that's here. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, governor.

MELISSA SZASZ: Next up on the list we have Connie Erickson, Chairwoman for Trenton Indian [unintelligible].

CONNIE ERICKSON: Oh, thank you. Hi, I'm Connie Erickson. I am on the board of directors. I'm a Montana representative at the Trenton Indian Service Area. We are Turtle Mountain. We have-- our district is-- it's a service area and IHS and other things including the elderly. We service two states, Montana and North Dakota, six counties. And this is-- I've only been in since last May. I was put-- elected in. And so I'm new at this whole thing. My main reason for being here today-- or this week was to learn about the different program.

I think it's imperative for our board of directors to be able to know about the different programs that are out there and be informed so that we are able to help when our directors of the program come into our meetings and say, hey, this is what we need. That's the reason I'm here. I have learned a lot from everything. I'm completely overwhelmed with all the knowledge that's coming in, and it has only been one day. (Chuckles)

So I just, like I said, we would like-- I would like to see our TISA board and any other boards get this kind of training because I think that it is seriously imperative for us to know to be able to help our different programs. And so my goal is basically to become informed on all the different programs and this one is very near and dear to my heart because I have two elderly parents that this program helps.

And the one thing with us is we really need to make sure, and at TISA, is that we are serving both our states, and then sometimes Montana gets kind of shoved off to the side because everything is in North Dakota. So that's kind of the one thing my goal is, is to bring more help and without being-- you know, how do I say it, more help or better help to our Montanans as well as our North Dakotans. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: I need to interrupt one minute. Percy, this is for you. You've all heard me for as long as any of you know me talk about my grandma. My Grandma Tressa that made such a huge impact in my life. My Grandma Tressa was Connie Joe's auntie. My grandma and Connie's grandpa were brother and sister. So I am so proud that my little baby cousin came out here today in her new role and testified on behalf of the tribal [audio cuts out]. My little baby cousin. (Chuckles)

MELISSA SZASZ: So we have Councilwoman Loni Taylor, on Zoom from Chippewa Cree.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: From where?

MELISSA SZASZ: Chippewa Cree.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Chippewa Cree. Hello, Montana!

LONI TAYLOR: Hi! [Speaks Native language]. I'm from Rocky Boy. My name is Loni Taylor. I sit on our tribal council for the Chippewa Cree Tribe here in Rocky Boy. It's very good to be on here. I wish I was there in person. It's always better in person. But, well, first of all, I'm going to say, hi, mom, because she's sitting there in the audience, if you guys-- hello, Miss Cynthia.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: (Chuckles)

LONI TAYLOR: My mom is our senior director for our tribe and, you know, just a personal little I guess background, whenever I go in, because our tribal office is right next to our senior center, and anytime I go into that building, you know, it's smells safe as far as it always smells like smudge. So it smells safe in there. It's a safe feeling. And I think it's important for all senior centers across everywhere to have that feeling because those are precious gifts. You know, I'm pretty lucky-- I'll say I'm pretty lucky that I still get to say grandma and grandpa. I still have my maternal grandfather.

His name is Irvin Watson. And I still get to say grandma. My dad's mom, she's still with us here too. And they have so much knowledge. They're fluent Cree speakers. And, you know, and being-- I'm not young, but I'm the youngest on our council, and being the youngest, it just like it hits you more to want to take care of your elders more. I mean, you know, that my council are my elders, my colleagues are my elders, my parents now, you know, they're getting to be my elders.

But I'd just like to add in, you know, I'm really in agreement with the- the- the governor of the San Felipe. A lot of what he stated, you know, it- it also hits with our tribe, too, as far as, you know, it's hard to afford to keep on workers for delivery. It's hard to compete, like he said, you know, with-- to keep our workers on. It would be really good, I was looking at the list earlier on your directors duties, that's a lot. (Chuckles)

And I know every director, no matter where you're director at, there's a lot on your plate. But as far as senior directors, like there's a lot of you wish you could focus on certain things, but you could only skim the waters and you could dive in on a couple other things, but then you're pulled back out and skim those waters. It's just tough. That's how it is on council, too, unfortunately.

You know, I'd like to invite-- I would like to invite Cynthia, you know, your office and the other head honchos to our tribe. Come out to our reservation, come into Montana. And, Miss Connie, invite you to. You know, I don't know if our county is in the ones you cover for Montana, but we're in Hill County. It goes Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, and then us, and then Blackfeet.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yep.

LONI TAYLOR: And then we have the southern tribes. So that's good. Please come out. We'll take good care of you. We'll feed you good. Take you on a little-- our little rez tour. I think what would also be important, and maybe it's already implemented, but I'm going to voice it anyways, is to collaborate with mental health. You know, here in the State of Montana, we just had a tribal consultation with our-- some state legislators. It's on our-- on mental health issues. And they kind of focused-- I mean it's focused on everyone, but I think if we collaborated with like youth and our elders because it hits both.

And everyone in between, for that matter, but if there is some sort of collaboration to help with mental health because a lot of our elders, you know, they just want to visit. They just want to-- and a nice meal is nice to have, you know, a couple of times a week, a few times a week. Like for us, you know, literally overnight our meals was went from-- it was like 89 to 210

something like that overnight. Literally it changed when the pandemic hit and then it stayed up and it's building up over that 210.

And there's a few times where I was able to go help deliver meals. And one of my extended relatives, you know, I call him grampa, he's like my grandpa's cousin, and I really took his meal to him and he opened the screen door, he's like, oh, hello there, what did they do, demote you? Because I'm on council, so he thought, you know, he was teasing, but I sat with him for a little while and, you know, visited with him and took, you know, give him his meal. And-- but those elders, they like- they like to be made to smile.

You know, they like to just visit, hear them out, you know, let them tell us their stories. So I think he was at one of the last of my deliveries that day and it was probably a good thing because the couple meals I had left, one wasn't home and the other one probably got kind of a colder meal (chuckles) because I had to sit and visit. But those sort of things, like just a mutual, you know, kind respect, I think it can go a long ways.

And I know you guys know that. I'm probably speaking to the choir when I say that, but I just feel the need to voice it at the, you know, at the federal-- whatever federal, you know, people are in the room, they're-- it's very-- they're important to us, you know. Just like the other leaders have mentioned, they're our treasures, they're our knowledge keepers and our language-- you know, we lost a lot of-- unfortunately, we lost a lot of our first language speakers during the pandemic.

And it's sad and scary, but at the same time, you know, there's a lot of hope, too. And so I would just like to say, you know, there's a lot of good on all of our-- all our reservations, all of our tribes, a lot of good in the senior center areas. And then there's the good stuff that could be improved because I don't like emphasizing or focusing on any negative stuff or the not so good stuff. You know, I'd rather-- it's all good stuff, it just some of it needs to be improved and we could use some help with that.

And I think other tribes are in that same boat, so-- but just to reiterate, you know, what the- the governor for San Felipe, you know, it's- it's good to-- any extra help we could get. I know, Cynthia, you mentioned, you know, we're a poor, little agency in that area, but if enough of us tribal leaders can get to other consultations with our state senators, you know, go to the Hill and all that good stuff, if it's repeated enough, if it's ground into their brains enough, you know, they'll help or they'll do something. So I'm all for it. I could be as vocal as I can. I'm a good listener. For the most part I'm a good listener. But I try my best for my tribe and my elders, and I'll just-- I'll put a comma there for now and thank you for letting me speak.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Loni. I can't come to Rocky Boy, Loni, because your mom is trying to match me up with some old derelict guy there that nobody else wants.

LONI TAYLOR: (Laughs)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: So I have to stay away from Rocky Boy.

LONI TAYLOR: Well, I'll protect you.

(Laughter)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you. Go ahead, Melissa.

MELISSA SZASZ: Next we have James Delacruz, Chairman for NICOA.

JAMES DELACRUZ: Let me-- let me first of all correct that, I'm the acting chairman. I'm the vice chairman. Today, with me, I'm also joined by our executive director, Billie Tohee, from National Indian Council on Aging, board member from the National Indian Council on Aging, Eileen Lujan. Okay. And one of the things I want to share with you today, you can recognize me be as far as BFE, and that's before Edwin. (Chuckles) So I've been here a day or two. [Unintelligible], but rather I'm proud of the work that you've done for us over time.

One of the things our chair, our director, and another board member, we just returned from Capitol Hill, visited with Senator Murkowski, senator from New Mexico, and I previously met with the Cantwell and Murray. One of the things that's up on your screen and I asked them to focus on and target with reauthorization and appropriations is providing technical assistance and training for Title VI grantees.

One of the things we know, we're having a wonderful meeting here today, and it is greatly appreciated, but also many of you don't know, but this is coming out of our meal program. Is that right? And I appreciate you for doing that, but that's-- in a way, that's not a good thing. But one of the things that they're going to look at and we will work with you on seeing that there's a, I don't know, a [unintelligible] person or set aside for dollars for training of national Title VI directors so it don't come out of our general services.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: We're going to use Edwin's salary when he leaves.

JAMES DELACRUZ: Okay. Wherever it comes from. The lady next to you might not like that. (Chuckles)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: I'm sorry.

(Chuckling)

JAMES DELACRUZ: Okay. And so, you know, we really need to focus on that, in my mind, so that we can get those services that are-- need to be out there for- for our elders, our nutrition, transportation, however the tribes choose to use them. And still I'm not clear on this ACL technical advisory board. It's calling from tribal leaders. I imagine you're going to select the tribal leader from each area to be on this board.

And I'm encouraging-- and- and they supported it on the Hill today and other speakers have supported it as well, is National Indian Council on Aging is not a part of this. But we're the only national Indian organization in the country, and a lot of the concerns and tools we carry with us. And so, when this consultation advisory board is put together, we're still saying we hope, even though we're not tribal leaders, we're not government, but we are deeply involved in what's happening in aging. And so, but I'll put that on the table again here today. It might not work, but I think it's something that needs to be considered. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Mr. Delacruz. I'm going to say one quick thing because Edwin's not paying any attention to me, so he won't know I'm saying this, but the advisory committee you're speaking of, James, has to do with our Tribal Consultation Policy, and we have asked-- we, meaning ACL, Allison has put supporting our Tribal Consultation Policy in our request for funds to-- in our budget to the President.

And the President is looking to support that if it goes through Congress-- has supported it, yes, if it goes through Congress. Now it's up to you guys who talk with your congressional delegates because this is a brand new consultation policy we've just put together, we have not named our board-- our advisory committees yet. There's plans in the consultation policy to develop one, two advisory committees, whatever the need may be, but we don't have any money to support them. We do not have a penny towards a Zoom call and even less pennies towards bringing anyone into D.C. as these national committees usually do.

So I'm going to encourage you, when you're talking to your congressional delegates-- this is not a paid political announcement-- when you're talking to your congressional delegates, too, about the budget and about your concerns for your program, you may also mention the importance of ACL's Tribal Consultation so that we can consult. And the way that those committees are determined, again, FACA rules determine the membership on the committees, but the tribal leaders can then tell us to include others as advisors. So that's sort of where my little head is. Next, Melissa.

MELISSA SZASZ: Are there any other elected officials or chairmen that want to speak before we open the floor?

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Anyone else on the phone? [Pause] Go ahead, dear.

MELISSA SZASZ: --Shawn.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Oh, yes, you wanted to be on the record. By the way, Wilson Wewa, your comments are on the record. You're-- yep, that- that made it into the record. We might not be able to do anything about it today, but it's in the record.

SHAWN DURAN: Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak before you today. First, before I speak, I'd like to acknowledge all past elders, all current elders, and those that are becoming elders. I think that's important that we say that at this conference (chuckles) because we're here on behalf of our elders. My name is Shawn Duran, and I'm appointed by the Taos Pueblo Tribal Council as of 2022 as their chief of operations officer.

So I do have permission to speak on behalf of Governor Fred L. Romero, our Governor of Taos Pueblo this administration. I also support the words and the thoughts of our tribal leaders that have spoken before me. But I believe one important issue being here and listening, I also serve on self-governance advisory councils that do support tribes across the nation in self-determination and self-governance.

And I think one of the things that is hitting me here is the notion that we have Executive Order 114-112 that was given to the White House Council Native Summit last winter, and I

think within that-- those words that- that we can utilize what it says to help get the resources we need for our elders across the board. Because the needs in Indian Country aren't-- don't rest in one or two federal agencies, they're across all federal agencies.

So hearing even about data earlier that IHS might not be aware of some of the data that's within this group, this agency, why not use that executive order? And you're talking about implementation of OAA. Utilize that executive order to promote flexibility, to promote those communications in between the agencies that we so desperately need as tribes. We are pin-holed into having to go to each and every federal agency. Where can the federal government make that umbrella possible between the agencies so that tribes have a better crosswalk in order to seek the resources that we need so desperately?

And also, in some of the states, they don't have good relationships with tribes. That's another one. How can we help bridge those communication barriers? It's- it's really utilizing that executive order to the best needs of tribal Indian Country. Also, support for implementation that reflect tribal court values in programming. Too long have we had prescriptive programming delivered to tribes. Past federal Indian policies show that out. And so we need to really promote flexibility in how we deliver programming by allowing us to choose core values as implementation methodologies for our elders.

Because that's what-- we know now what's best for our people and we just need to create those pathways and flexibilities in order to do what we need to do for our people. With the support of the federal agencies. We can't do it without you, but we also need to be true to who we are as tribal people in support of our elders.

So, with that, I just thank you. I'm hoping that there will be an agreement between IHS and this group. I mean, you're in the same federal department, there should be segues to do that and free communication to create those flexibilities and even look at ways of streamlining to create more resources to the boots on the ground. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you very much. And it's folks- it's folks like you, you know, that help us accomplish that. We may dream it up out here in our big ivory tower, but it's you ground folks that help us accomplish those collaborations. So, yes, who's next?

MELISSA SZASZ: Next we have Sara Candelaria.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: [Audio cuts out] (Chuckles)

SARA CANDELARIA: Well, thank you for that marvelous welcome.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: You should take that woo woo woo out of the transcript, by the way.

(Chuckling)

SARA CANDELARIA: [Speaks Native language] Good afternoon, everyone. It is an honor to be before you yet again, providing you with the testimony that's necessary for us to continue serving our elders within our communities. I believe that this is a very critical part in what we do and having the opportunity to meet face to face to really hear each other out and

understand and also have the opportunity to ask questions and get the response at the same time is an invaluable process to us. I wish on other levels we could do the same, but hopefully one day we will achieve that.

Before I start, I want to start with a quote. "Fight for the things you care about but do it in a way that will lead others to join." That was from the great Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And up until her passing, I've always looked at the way she led, her leadership style, and I always tried to strive to lead the way she did. And along the way, I know I've rocked a lot of boats. Not in a bad way, not intentionally, but with intent. And I hope that the words of our governor, his testimony, resonate with what we all do.

We all have a common goal. We have a shared vision for our elders. And it's time for action. We can't keep talking about the same obstacles, the same challenges, the same issues, year after year after year because it's-- that tune is becoming old. It's time for action. I've heard since the beginning of this testimony the statement of we don't have money, we don't have a lot of money, we don't have funds, but let me tell you this, we don't have funds either. We don't have a lot of money.

We penny pinch, too, but somehow, some way we make things happen. We find our way to D.C. even though it may cost us a big chunk of our budget, but we come. Because what we do is critically important to who we are and where we come from. It's those young ladies and gentlemen back in our communities that we're here for. And it's-- I'm at a point in my life where I'm on both spectrums of receiving services and providing services. I was recently a caregiver. I lost my mother-in-law back in January.

So I know what it's like. I understand the frustrations. I'm better equipped to be able to serve not only my elders but the families and the caregivers better. So I stand before you today to ask you, please, please, let's start working towards action. Everything that Governor Ortiz has put before you, the items he talked about, let's work together to make it happen. Let's not continue to say that we have a common goal but not act on that goal.

We need to achieve success. Whether it's all of us going up to the Hill and making them listen to us, whether it's going and standing in front of the White House and having the President see who we actually are, we need to start achieving something. I'm not saying we haven't done nothing, but in working together, collaborating, and doing what's best for our elders, we can do so many great things.

I ask again for you to really consider NSIP, Nutrition Services Incentive Program. That program is severely underfunded. It's hard when the pandemic hit, our numbers, our client numbers went up, but I don't have enough money to serve every single one of them. But, again, somehow I manage. Those meals are critically important to our elders. That's probably the one nutritious meal they receive daily.

And with the cost of food, with the cost of the transportation that it costs for us to go either pick up or get it delivered, it's hard to make things happen. It's becoming increasingly harder to make it happen. So I ask that you relatively soon look at that funding and work towards adjusting the numbers to help us accommodate the needs of our elders. Again, with that of course is the staff. The people in this room are very special people. It takes a special person to do what we do.

We don't get paid a whole heck of a lot. We don't live in big homes. We don't drive expensive cars. We don't- we don't have a lot. What we do comes from our heart. The

compassion and the empathy that we share with our elders with the interactions comes from our heart. And it takes special people to do those jobs. And when we find them, we want to keep them. It's hard-- it has been hard these last few years for us to retain our staff because it's all about survival. You can't-- as much as we want to, you can't survive on that love, compassion, and empathy.

We have families to support. We have mouths to feed too. So it's time that we really look at making adjustments to address the inequities across Native America to make sure we have enough funding to serve not only our elders but our staff as well. It's critically important that these people-- I look around the room and there's so many new faces. There's a few handful of us veterans still here.

I've been doing this work for almost 12 years. And in that time, I have enjoyed watching myself grow as an advocate, as a professional providing a direct service. And I don't have anyone else to thank but Miss Cynthia and Miss Kathy Greenlee. They are my biggest role models to get to where I'm at. Of course, I have my faith and beliefs, but they played a part in this too.

I really want you to understand that it's very difficult when you feel like you've made progress having gone five steps forward only to fall back three. And what I mean by that is really how things are within the State of New Mexico. I stand before you asking for more oversight. The State of New Mexico submits a state plan to the federal agency for the funding that it provides to the state. Time and time again, I've reviewed the Older Americans Act. I've reviewed the statutes.

I've reviewed the regulations. There's nowhere within that statute that excludes Native American elders from receiving services and supports by the state through Title III. We were fortunate enough to finally be allowed to apply for Title III funding, this was in '22, only to be handed a cumbersome process which made it very difficult for any one of the pueblos in our state to apply for that funding because they don't have the capacity, they don't have the staffing to be able to create a competitive RFP.

And the RFP process is something that I don't agree with either because you're making us compete against one another for those funds. I don't know how much- how much oversight or input you have in the application process, but I beg you to please take a look at it. I don't know if they require approvals to have those RFP's, but I don't agree with having questions such as land base and economic opportunities within our reservations in those applications. That shouldn't even be a basis for determining any type of access to resource or funding. You prohibit it in your federal statutes and your regulations.

You prohibit means testing. And what I talked about earlier, having been handed a tool, a tool meaning a survey to complete and submit back to the state, everything within that document constitutes means testing, which I don't agree with. These are the things that I'm asking you to pay attention to. Because whether you realize it or not, and whether the state realizes it or not, it impacts us detrimentally.

And I wish that there was more communication and consultation, inclusion, and involvement in a lot of the processes that take place within our state. I'm coming to you as my-- as a resource to help me get to where I need to be. Not just me. I shouldn't say I. Where we need to be. There's a number of New Mexico representatives here. There's a number of tribal

leaders here who have shown that support to us since we began this journey. And I, for one, am grateful for their support because without it we wouldn't be where we're at today.

I really, really want to work with not only you, but them, but you have to be willing to work with somebody to make success happen. And if you're choosing to exclude, if you're choosing to step back and do things your own way, it won't work. So I'm asking that we collaborate, we sit down and talk about how we can move forward together with that common goal. I talked this morning about the Title VI, Title III coordination that's almost nonexistent in New Mexico. We don't get no invitations to meetings.

We don't get no invitations to things that would impact us as far as decision-making and process development. We don't-- we had no input in what I was handed today and expected to complete. But we are expected to submit on the timely basis. If we don't, there's always that threat of pulling money back, which I don't agree with. It shouldn't be that way. Because when you pull funds back, you're not-- it's not-- it has nothing to do with me. Like I tell my group of people who work for me here, it's not about us.

It's not about me. It's not about what I want. It's about what those people that we serve need. It's about what they lack. Because they deserve everything that they've earned up to this point. They were once our caregivers. They gave us who we are. It's time for us to pay them back. My grandparents had a hand in my raising and they always taught me when you get to that point in your life where you can take care of others, return the favor and take care of your elders because you didn't get to where you're at by yourself.

You needed them to become who you are today. And, honestly, I am very proud of who I am today. So I ask- I ask that you really look at that oversight. I ask that you look at your own regulations and your statutes to make sure that there is equity and equality across the board. I mean, I'm hearing other members from other tribes and nations who are facing similar situations, so I think it's time.

It's time for action, and I'm calling upon you for that action to help us get to where we need to be. The last thing that I want to talk about is the tribal consultation process. I am truly grateful for the new process that has been established. I'm looking forward to what it will bring. But I also want you to understand that tribal consultation is not sending a letter or an email.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yes.

SARA CANDELARIA: It is face to face what we're doing here today. And regardless of not having money to travel or money to go and do what you want to do, we have new means because of the pandemic, so I urge you to consider those means to include and involve us in all the decisions that will directly impact us because the federal government does have a trust responsibility to tribes and nations. And, frankly, to be honest, y'all haven't lived up to it. A lot has been taken from Native country and Native people and there will never be enough give back to make up for all that we have lost.

But, as Governor Ortiz mentioned, with the support and the love, the strength and resilience that we get from our elders, we will endure and we will live to see another day. Because that's what Creator intended for us. We are the First Peoples of this America and we will be here for the long run. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Sara.

SARA CANDELARIA: Oh, one more thing. Edwin, I know I told you can't and-- you can't move on, you can't retire, but I leave you with this, if your actions create a legacy that inspires others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, then you are an excellent leader. Thank you for all that you have given me.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: I love you. Thank you. And- and, Sara, I want to say one thing quickly about travel and to all of you about travel. There is not a week, I don't think, that I did not go into this guy's office or one of these ladies, or Jasmine would go in to Edwin's office, we have to get out. We have the most high-risk programs in the agency. We have programs that we have two weeks left and they still haven't spent out a million dollars. We're going to lose that money. We beg to get out and monitor tribes and tribal programs. What's your response all the time, bad guy?

EDWIN WALKER: That you get more of my money than anybody else. (Chuckles)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: And he thinks it's so funny when he says it. Cecilia, we go nowhere, right? See, you're lying, Edwin Walker. Go ahead, Melissa.

MELISSA SZASZ: Next on our list we have Nancy Velasquez.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Nancy, where are you?

MELISSA SZASZ: Nancy? My--

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: She'll be back in.

MELISSA SZASZ: Okay. Next on the list then is Lisa James.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Lisa James, Cherokee, Oklahoma.

MELISSA SZASZ: Oh--

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: (Singing) Oklahoma, where the wind comes sweeping down--

LISA JAMES: Down a plane and a waving-- all right, my name is Lisa James and I'm the manager of elder programs for Cherokee Nation. And I've been at Cherokee Nation 33 years, 23 years as a Title VI program manager, elder programs. And I just, I hate to hear what's going on in other states. I have to always tell you what a great state Oklahoma is. Their AAA's have always been-- they've always worked with us.

And it could be, too, that we gave a lot of people who are tribal members who are actually employed with AAA's, and that may have been why we were able to work so well with those AAA's. But it also takes us as tribal members to go over there, go to them AAA's and say,

hey, you know, do you see me? This is my name, I'm Title VI manager, and I know you have to work with me and I'm willing to work with you.

You know, that's part of our- our responsibility as Title VI directors also is to go introduce yourself, say, hey, you know, we can- we can do more things together than we can do separately. And that's just what my-- I'd like to say about these new issues that you-- have been brought up about Title III and Title VI collaboration. It was always there. Now we've got-- everybody's going to have skin in the game, as they used to say. Title III has skin in the game. They're going to have to do it. It's in the statute. And so-- and it always has been.

But as far as training, I'd love cluster trainings. That way you could get to know the people individually and you can have a rapport with them individually. But lately the webinars are great. You have good webinars. And the one-on-one meetings, I think all new Title VI directors ought to get one-on-one meetings in a webinar form or anything like that. I was wanting to talk about those tribal consultation questions first.

And I'm going to bring up again what I always bring up for the last 23 years, like the young lady said, we keep saying it over and over and it's not happening, not making any changes, but Cherokee Nation has 14 senior nutrition sites. Choctaw Nation has 18. Chickasaws have 12 senior nutrition sites. We get the same amount of money as any tribe who has 1,501 elders.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yep.

LISA JAMES: I've got 75,000 elders in the 14 counties in northeastern Oklahoma that are from the age 50, which is our service number, we start at age 50, 50 and above, 75,000 people. I can't even begin to touch that with the Title VI money. You barely can hire staff for Title VI money, let alone a cook for all the 14 sites. And staff, other assisting staff, we can't do it. If it wasn't for tribal dollars, which you cannot always count on, then you can-- you can't do it. So the funding level has got to change. It has got to change.

We have so many-- we're not going away. Our numbers are increasing. You can look at our demographics. We have over 500,000 Cherokees and probably three-- two quarters of them-- how many is it-- let's see, about 300,000, 200,000 live in-- 300,000 live in the service area, 14 counties of Oklahoma. And it's-- the age- the age that's-- we just can't touch the people who are in our age range. We need funding We got to have funding or we just can't keep doing this.

It's-- and it's to the detriment to everybody. If we don't do it, the State of Oklahoma is going to have to pick it up. They're going to have to have funding for it. And they don't have it. And if we did have it, I don't know that the current governor would want to share with us. You know, the grassroots, the people work together, but the governor at this time is not very cooperative with tribes, if you watch some of our news.

But that's- that's the main focus that I wanted to share with you is that funding isn't there. It's hard to operate large tribal nutrition programs on what we get. Very hard. And we're looking to increase by two our nutrition sites. We may have 16 within the next year. That's all I have to say. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Lisa. I'm going to- I'm going to remind everybody we've had-- I've been taking notes. Every single person has mentioned increased funds. We-- again, just a reminder, we put in our budget to the President and our prepared budgets each year, and like Alison said-- Alison with all the titles, remember my boss? Alison said that we double the request for Title VI money every year and we never get double.

And so that's as much as we can do. We can take our little piece of paper and our little budget and we can do up our own little sheets and we can show Congress, here, we're requesting \$989,000,000 for Title VI this year because the \$49,000,000 you're giving isn't sufficient. And then we present it and it goes in with all the other HHS budgets, and then Congress looks at it and says, oh, nope, we're not going to-- no, those Indians don't need-- no, let's end the Older Americans Act.

We don't need the Older Americans Act at all. That's silly. Why would we take care of those old people? Nope, nope, nope, we're not going to fund that. And we have-- it's out of our hands. Go talk to Tom Cole. Go talk to Jon Tester. Go talk to whoever your congressional delegates are or their staff and tell them how much more money we need to operate these programs. Tell them the 73 cents a meal or whatever we're giving you for NSIP is an absurd level of funding.

Tell them that giving the Cherokee Nation, what do you get, \$198,000 or something to feed all your people is absurd. We know that. Before Edwin was- was leaving, I made sure that I understood as well as anybody how we arrived at that funding formula we use. And we tried out a whole bunch of funding formulas I'm told, and that one seemed to be the most consistent to get money evenly spread out to tribes-- into the mic. Yes, sir.

I expect that once we get our tribal consultation committee that Delacruz was talking about, we can have real Indians on an advisory committee telling us how they want us to operate and communicate about our programs, then I'm going to ask them to review our funding formula and help us determine if-- you know, present all the information we use. If you guys think of a better one, present it to us and we'll consider it. But, yep, we've used that funding formula for a lot of years. And I know it's-- I know, I understand because I used to be funded under that little, tiny formula as well. Melissa.

LISA JAMES: I got one--

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Lisa's not done?

LISA JAMES: No.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Lisa gets two--

LISA JAMES: I took this away from her. No. (Chuckles) We noticed on page 11681, under Statute 1322.3, under definitions, Indian Reservation, any former reservation in Oklahoma, under the McGirt ruling, we are a reservation area now. So that probably needs to be changed, under the McGirt ruling.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: That's a very good point. I know we did not consider the McGirt. We looked at maps, huh?

AMY WIATR-RODRIGUEZ: [Unintelligible] statute.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yeah, we have what's in the statute.

AMY WIATR-RODRIGUEZ: Yes, so I think we use the definition that was in the Older Americans Act. And I'm not familiar, so I'm going to hand it to Edwin.

EDWIN WALKER: Right. I think what you're-- I don't have the paper before me, but I think what you're referring to is the definition that we mirrored from the Old Americans Act, and so we can't change that because it is statutory. In order for us to change it, the Congress would have to change the definition. Sandy, is that what it is?

SANDY MARKWOOD: Yeah. In saying that, you know, as far as changing the statute, as you know, the reauthorization, the Older Americans Act is up this year, so I-- this-- that is a change that, if you could get me the information, we will be happy to be able to advocate for in the reauthorization. The other point that I just want to make is following up on Cynthia's comments about funding. You need to advocate for funding. ACL and Alison and the Biden Administration have done all they can by asking for additional funding, but it is Congress that appropriates that funding.

Everyone in this room has a voice. You all have data about unmet needs. You all have stories about people who you've helped with meals and helped with caregiver support, but also you know the people that you don't have the resources to be able to help. What you need to do is to be able to reach out to your members of Congress and give them the data, but back it up with the stories that only you know. That's the- that's the miracle combination that gets their attention.

And when they come home off recess, and all of that is public knowledge, invite them into your programs to see the people that you are serving, to see the needs that you have in your community, and to see the unmet needs. All of these people work for you. And you need to give them the information. As Cynthia was saying before about Kathy Greenlee, sometimes it's not that people want to do the wrong thing, they just don't know any better. And you have the voice and you have the data and you have the stories to let them know what they need to do, which is to increase funding for Title VI.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Sandy. And I'm so glad-- thank you- thank you two times. Thank you for what you just said, Sandy, but thank you also for speaking up to remind us all that U.S. Aging goes up on the Hill on our behalf. They're the ones who go to congressional delegates. They're the one that supports our budgets that our office proposes. They're the ones that take these stories. They're the ones putting together this LTSS survey and taking those stories. So work closely with you U.S. Aging.

Keep Sandy-- get her- get her email address and her phone number and put it at the top of your list. And when you think of these things or when something happens, when that elder

that was living independently all of a sudden is financially abused by somebody in his family and there's no place to put that person, talk to Sandy about that. Give her that problem and let her take that problem and carry it. So, please, please, yes, Sandy is one of our best advocates and please work with her and listen carefully.

SANDY MARKWOOD: And if I could also add, we are also very privileged and pleased to work with NICOA when we go up to the Hill as well. So all of our voices together are much more powerful. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thanks, Sandy. Any other comments, Melissa?

MELISSA SZASZ: Yes, we have three more on the list. Nancy Velasquez is next.

(Laughter)

NANCIE VELASQUEZ: I made it, Cynthia.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: --Nancy.

NANCIE VELASQUEZ: I made it. I made it. Sorry I went over to fiscal and data boot camp and everything. So the last couple of years have been really good except that, for Part A, we did run out of money. So I will be talking to our chairwoman about contacting our congressmen. A couple-- there's a couple of them that we could talk to because we have the five locations so that we can speak to them about receiving more monies.

Because we started taking on more elders in different locations. In Omaha, we gained I believe like seven more elders. In our Lincoln location, we gained probably eight or nine. So the Part C funds we're fine on. We used that money up and we're going to do a lot of good things with it. But Part A, we completely ran out of money.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Okay. Thanks, Nancy. I want to-- while we're going to the next person, I want to mention a committee last week that we-- Alison got to testify for and the rest of us got to watch it. It was the HELP Committee, which is a congressional committee chaired by Bernie Sanders, and they're talking reauthorization of the Older Americans Act.

EDWIN WALKER: They're responsible.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: They're responsible for reauthorization. So it was Alison, our boss, it was the woman, I don't remember her name, who's the head of Meals on Wheels Foundation or Association.

EDWIN WALKER: Ellie.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Ellie. There was another person there. There was--

EDWIN WALKER: NCOA.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: NICOA was there. Yep. So there's two panels. And there's-- so there's all these big, you know, national agencies. There's Alison, the big fed, and there's a little old lady that's 92 years old. And this little old lady was just cute and she talked about, oh, this meal means so much and these people stop by and they knock on her door and she knows they're going to come, and, oh, it's so wonderful. And she went on and on and on. Guess who most questions were directed to by those congressional delegates?

Not to Alison, our boss, who knows this stuff. Nuh-uh. They went to that little old lady. They wanted to hear more from that elderly woman about how important these meals are and about her life and how this program helps her [unintelligible]. So, just like Sandy said, those stories are powerful. And they want to listen to real people. Nobody wants to listen to us. We talk all the time.

You guys don't even want to listen to us. So bring real people. Bring your elders. Take your elders into congressional delegate's office. If the Congress is out of session and your senator is back in your home state, absolutely pack up your senior bus with your- with your elders, make them some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and a jug of water and head to the congressional office. They'll have a ball and they'll be so proud. Melissa, who's next?

MELISSA SZASZ: Melanie Black Bull

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: --where did you go?

MELISSA SZASZ: Oh, found you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Melanie is Oglala, Pine Ridge, South Dakota.

MELANIE BLACK BULL: Good afternoon. My name is Melanie Black Bull, and I'm coming here from Frank Star Comes Out, the President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe. I really would like to thank each and every one of you here for echoing our concerns and echoing our needs. We all have the same stories and you all did a wonderful job. I wanted to focus my presentation on requesting a special earmark, funding for infrastructure. I haven't heard that from anybody, but I have nine sites on my reservation. We have 52,465 tribal members. Of that, we have 3,041 elders who are age 60 and older.

We have approximately 901 who are going to be aging into our-- who are going to be turning age 60. The need for infrastructure is really, really important. Our buildings are dilapidated. I don't know if you all know this, but South Dakota, we really have a hard time working with our Title III in South Dakota. They don't let us know when we have meetings. I tried to encourage our other tribes from South Dakota to get involved. There's missed monies. There's missed opportunities. They really do not work with us well.

We do need infrastructure. And the funding that we do get, we provide meals on a daily basis, anywhere from 900 to 1,069. That's how many meals we provide in a day. Our tribe assists us with funding. And keeping our employees is really, really hard. We collaborate really hard with the WIOA Program. The Department of Labor has really stepped up to the plate and

assisted us. We've been trying to be innovative. We've applied for grants. We applied for funding through the state. And we're just not getting anywhere with the state.

So I request-- I am going to be meeting with our senators and our congressmen. I believe we are going to their offices here, so I apologize for stepping away and my group for stepping away. We want to go meet with them and let them know that we need funding. We need a special earmark. Every tribe needs a special earmark. We shouldn't be competing for this. We have huge unmet needs. And all of my staff, their heart, we're in it for the long run. During the pandemic, it really affected-- it has really affected our tribes.

We lost so many, but we also have more aging in. And when I hear other tribes say that is their only nutritious meal for that day, that's true. Oglala Lakota County has 4,869 homes. We live in a rural area. We have to drive almost 40 miles to do a delivery because our elders don't have transportation. We have a transit program that works on our reservation, but you can't expect an elder to get up at 6:00 in the morning and be taken to the site. That's just not doable. Bennett County, we have 1,019 homes where our elders live.

Jackson County, we have 584. There's other missed elders that we weren't able to grasp, but we have so many elders out there. So many. We are-- we have stretched it as far as we could. We rely-- we work with Feeding South Dakota. We work with donations. My staff even have fundraising events. We donate out of our pocket and we go that extra mile. So having a special earmark being available to all of our tribes is important. We all have building issues. We all have capacities where we want our elders to come to our sites and to participate and get out of social isolation.

They're dealing with emotional, they're dealing with issues, they're dealing, and we want to bring them to our sites, but we need buildings. So I ask that you include that on there. Include an amount that is sufficient for that tribe. And I know that, you know, I've been here four years. I served in different capacities and I've been to the Hill. And I think that maybe whenever we have our next meeting, maybe we should split up in groups.

Every single one of us here, we need to do a plan with our attorneys. We need to get the proper format of going up to the Hill and showing and telling our stories. This is what we used to do when we were a part of a college. We have groups going up there right now. And I think it's important that all of us here, they only give you 15-minute sessions, but you have to get your numbers right, you have to have your presentation in order, and it has to be rock solid. We have to set up those appointments with every single state to say, hey, we need more money. We move to these prison camps and we're expected to live.

We have broken treaties. Our hospitals aren't fully funded. We've been spreading our services and our funding as far as we can and it's just, it's hard. Now you have people on your reservation fighting for jobs. Fighting to hold what's going to provide meals on their tables. But you can't expect \$12.99 to feed a family of eight. Not in this day and age. Even people at McDonald's make more money than we make.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yes.

MELANIE BLACK BULL: And it's hard. You can't buy your kids clothes. You can't buy your kids shoes. So I ask that you pound that hard, pound everything that we're saying, and develop a process so we can all go to the Hill, we can all go to the offices in groups. For every state.

Because if this has been going on for a long time, then let's try a different way. I thank you, Cynthia. [Speaks Native language]

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Miigwech. You know, at these- at these consultations, we're not supposed to respond, we're supposed to just listen, but I got to respond to that one very quickly. First to tell you that Senator Bernie Sanders was very concerned last week at that HELP meeting, or HELP discussion, committee meeting about infrastructure and about senior centers. He was asking if administration or Older Americans Act funds build new facilities, new senior centers. No, we don't.

But he was very interested in that. That is a huge need. Last fall I took Alison, Alison and I went to Pine Ridge. It was-- there was a STAC meeting out there. Melanie took us to four of her meal sites. Three of them were in condemned facilities where they were still cooking, but the seniors couldn't eat in there. Some of them-- two of them weren't safe to walk into. The rain had trenched the driveway, and they had put up painted pallets, blue, to try and make a walkway. But what happens to pallets sitting outside in South Dakota? They rot. So you take a couple steps and there is no-- there was nothing.

There was no access into those facilities for people like me, let alone people in a walker or a wheelchair. And then the fourth center she took us to was beautiful, it was brand new, but they could only set up 14 tables in it. It was a little tiny modular building. We have got to find money for infrastructure and buildings. Melanie, as far as your training on how do we go up on the Hill, how do we talk to congressional delegates, we got somebody at the end of the table here, U.S. Aging has that training. And we can put the-- we can contract-- go ahead, go ahead, go ahead.

SANDY MARKWOOD: Just so you don't cross any lines over there, Cynthia. (Chuckles) I am happy from U.S. Aging's perspective to offer you all a webinar on how-- on advocacy and going to the Hill. We have an incredible policy team. And, as I said, we've worked with NICOA on going up to the Hill together. So I'm happy to do that and we also-- any resources we have to assist you on that. The one thing that I would just, you know, I just want to mention though on the facilities is I think we need to look for other funding outside the Older Americans Act--

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Oh, yes, absolutely.

SANDY MARKWOOD: --for that, given the fact that, that act, no matter how hard we continue to advocate, never increases to the degree that we can meet the service need, the meal need that you have. I think what we need to do and there's been a lot of discussion on the Hill about improving our infrastructure. And, in fact, there's a program, the Community Development Block Grant Program, that is available to build facilities like senior centers. We need to look and advocate for funding.

My only concern is whether if we do it and we put all of this in the Older Americans Act, what we're going to be doing is skimming off the need for facilities from everything we've heard in this room is you need more money for services. So I think we need to work together to find the right avenue to get the money you need for facilities, but also to get the money that you need to increase the opportunity that you have to provide more services.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Yep. And I also ask Edwin about these special mark--

EDWIN WALKER: Earmarks.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: --earmarks because I didn't know about earmarks. And I work in a federal office, and all of a sudden we get a budget and we got like 90-some earmarks that were tagged on to ACL stuff. And it wasn't stuff that ACL normally does. But there were earmarks that some congressional delegate had attached to a bill, and they were passed, and then they find out who's going to do these earmarks. We don't know if they're going to continue. They had said that a year ago or so that, oh, earmarks aren't fair, we're not going to do that anymore. Ask anyway. Go talk to your congressional delegates.

Tell them how badly you need senior centers or how badly you need whatever it is. Ask them to write it in as an earmark. Have your tribal leader send a resolution from your tribe. Either they're going to attach it and it's going to go through or they're going to tell you no. And we've been told no by white guys for a long time. So we're not going to worry about that but ask for those earmarks. Talk to your leaders about it. And somebody, whether it's Adam or somebody at our office, can help us-- I had to bring him in-- but can help us kind of put that stuff together too. Okay, we got one more account, Laurai LaCounte Atcitty-- no, Atcitty LaCounte. Where is Laurai? I'm here.

LAURAI ATCITTY: I'm right here.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Hi!

LAURAI ATCITTY: Hi, Cynthia. I just wanted to thank you for allowing me to provide a testimonial. And for those of you that I have not met yet, my name is Laurai Atcitty. I am a Title VI director. I support four of the tribes in Arizona with their Title VI grant. And I'm also a AAA, an Area Agency on Aging director and I support 21 of the tribes in Arizona in that position. And I work with the Inner Tribal Council of Arizona, and I also work for Cynthia LaCounte full time as well. Had to put that in there.

I wanted to talk about the Federal Registry, and I really appreciate Amy Wiatr-Rodriguez's explanation. I feel like it's nice to get that information and, you know, 10 years ago, I don't even think we ever had a discussion about that. So the more information we're getting, it's just making us that much smarter about the process. So thank you for that. But I wanted to use some of those keywords because I think we need to look at the keywords within that registry in order to leverage our advocacy efforts.

So when I was thinking about training like your question had asked, it said-- I was thinking grant writing for sure because there's always-- there's grants that are out there and sometimes we are not skilled enough to write some of these complex grants. So it would be nice to have additional grant writing or, you know, second-, third-level grant writing, whatever that entails.

Also, I do appreciate Title VI efforts to bring into these trainings best practices. That has helped tremendously, not to mention the Title III and VI coordination efforts and the additional

training and the added training, the new training that we're going to need for that as well. And I also think that we need to look at employee mental health programs just because of, you know, COVID and, you know, all of the work during COVID that those employees and the emotions they had to encounter, that we need to work through those things.

I appreciate Sandy Markwood's organization and the advocacy that you put into your paperwork for professional development for Title VI. I thought that was amazing. Thank you. And also one of the keywords that I saw in the Federal Registry was advocacy responsibilities. So I think that there-- and it said, training on advocacy responsibilities, and the other piece to that was to become an effective visible advocate. So I think that that tells me right there that we need to see more training when it comes to advocacy.

For those-- and sorry, to add to that sentence, it said, for those in greatest social need. So I will appreciate it when I start to see more of that training. I do think that data collection is another piece we need to look at. The importance of waitlisting and having that data available. And the-- to better understand unmet needs because I feel like, in tribal communities, we get so used to going without that we see it as the norm instead of an unmet need. And that's why we're not counting these things or we're not considering this an unmet need.

And I think that the other thing that was mentioned in the Federal Registry was the best available data about how tribe-- and I think that the best available data is the data that the tribes communicate. So I think that falls back to the data coming from the tribes about the tribes. Now I'm putting my Title III hat on, and I wanted to-- and this is in support of the Title III and VI coordination, I think that I definitely agree with U.S. Aging in the regards of merging the congregate, home-delivered, and NSIP, especially when this affords us more flexibility, another keyword in the Federal Registry that I love.

It prevents us from having a limit or a percentage that we can transfer from one to another. You know, it's one less thing that we have to coordinate in order to finally get the money into a tribal community, especially when we're working on the Title III side to get money into the tribal community. I like the fact that it's utilizing the innovative practices that we acquired from COVID regarding the grab-and-go.

Some of our facilities have been closed for over a year and now that takes extensive cleaning and they're not ready to go into a congregate setting again. So we've got to now figure out how to support the elders using the grab-and-go options or the pickup options because we do still have some senior centers that have not been opened yet. These options would-- this option would eliminate the C1C2 transfer and the multiple steps of approvals needed to access funding for tribal communities.

The funding primarily used for C1C2 for Title VI, now back to Title VI, there's nothing left for a wrap around, and I think that we've heard that throughout the day, or access to services, needed services outside of nutrition, like transportation, outreach, health promotion, disease prevention, information assistance, counseling, case management services. So it bothers me because I do get more and more calls where from the senior center director saying, I only have two weeks of food left and then we're going to have to close, or, I have to call the food banks now because I'm out of food and see if they can give us some food, or, the senior staff are buying the food to keep the senior centers running.

My mom always talked about do you want it or do you need it? Do you want it? Do you need it? And so I was looking that up just now and it said, needs are things that are essential for

human survival, while wants are things we desire. Wants may be helpful or make life easier, but unless we would die without them, they are not considered needs. We shouldn't have to choose between a basic need of food versus other equally important needs, like health promotion, disease prevention, adult protective services. You always hear the saying, you can't always wait for what you want. I really think this should be restated as you can't always wait for what you need, especially in an aging program. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you, Laurai, very, very much. Your comments are always excellent. Melissa?

MELISSA SZASZ: We have one more in the back.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Oh, good grief. Okay.

(Chuckling)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Who's next?

JENNETTE SALVADOR: Good afternoon or good evening, my name is Jennette Salvador. I am from the Pueblo of Acoma, Senior Center Director. I am-- this is my first year in and I see a lot happening. Of course, I definitely know we are underfunded with a lot of needs. I mean, especially, you know, of course, my senior center needs is under substandard conditions and we don't receive enough funding as it is to make those, you know, rehab. There's other grants, other funding that we have to go after, and that's my biggest, you know, my tribe, my tribal leadership is always telling me go after other people's money.

So I encourage every single one of you to do just that. I am here, I've been here for the-- I was here last year at the-- this- this Title VI conference, and I made every opportunity to make sure I met with my congressional delegates. My governor didn't come with me last year, but I definitely made a point to go and have face-to-face with them so that I could share the needs of my community, my senior center.

And I am, on Thursday, going just as well, my governor is here meeting with tribal leader-- or the-- our congressional delegates as well. However-- and he is taking position papers for me on behalf of my senior center. But I'm doing a follow up on Thursday to go just do that once again. I don't know that there's a process, but I think that every single one of us is-- has a right as a constituent to go and visit your congressmen, your congressional delegates. It's an open door, you know?

I mean, even if you don't meet with your congressmen, congresswomen, or Congress or senators, they willingly accept any paperwork you take to their office and make it a point to share that. Last year, when I met with Congressman Vasquez, he actually came to the Pueblo of Acoma and asked for me because I went and visited him, made an impression because I shared with him the needs of my people, my community, my senior center, and he made it a point to come to the Pueblo of Acoma to speak with us and share what funding sources are out there. There's congressional direct spending.

Those are things that we can apply for, that I've applied for through my, you know, through my congressmen. There was-- there's three in New Mexico. I've applied for that. There's also the tribal-- for tribal leader-- tribal-- tribes here, there's the Tribal Infrastructure Fund. We have the Emergency Infrastructure Fund as well. Those are things that we can all be applying for on behalf of our senior centers. Because I know my senior center has infrastructure issues that need to be taken care of.

And, like I said, as we don't receive enough funding for Title VI, we're having to piecemeal our senior centers together and it's still not enough funding when it comes to remodeling or rehabbing our senior centers. So, again, I encourage everyone of you to go after other people's money. That is always our tribal leaders, tribal council, those are their directives to me all the time, go after other people's money.

There is money out there. We just have to look for it. And the other thing is on the grants, you know, we talk about we don't have the knowledge to be grant writers. Sara had mentioned that there is a special person, and every single one of you are those special people that advocate on behalf of our seniors, and I believe that, when we look at the grants, you basically just have to read it. They already have the language in there for the grants that you write. If you would just read it, look at it, massage the language to fit your communities, you can do it.

You're a grant writer. Do it. I'm just, you know, like I said, I'm a first year senior center director, but I have been coming, like I said, last year I showed up, I went on my own to go visit my congressional delegates. I set up those appointments. Because every single one of us, it says on their website, make a visit, set up an appointment. You guys can do that. I did it. You know, this year, my governor, I'm meeting him on Thursday.

He's already taking my papers, but I'm also doing a face-to-face because I want them to know who we are, what community I come from and making sure that they come and visit my community, see the needs that I have for my people. So again, I encourage you. I thank all of you, as national leaders, to continue to support us. And I ask again just that you continue to reauthorize the Title III-- or increase the Title VI funding, and then, of course, to reauthorize, continue reauthorizing the Older Americans Act.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Excellent.

JENNETTE SALVADOR: So I appreciate every single one of you and good job to all of you that take care of our elders and make them our priority because they are our historians. Thank you.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Thank you. Anyone else, Melissa?

MELISSA SZASZ: Not on my list.

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: Those were excellent closing comments. Thank you very much. Once again, you've given us a whole lot to take home and digest. Edwin probably won't be able to retire on Friday because you gave him new issues to resolve. Thank you very much. We'll have another honor for him soon.

(Chuckling)

CYNTHIA LACOUNTE: But thank you, this is going-- this is a public record. This will be-- we will develop a transcript and a report out of this, and we send those out. All of you who spoke, thank you so much. Absolutely. Edwin, Kari, Amy, Sandy. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.