

THOMAS YELLOW HAIR: Good afternoon, MR. Under Secretary. First, I want to express my appreciation for your presence here. And I was kind of looking at your testimony that you made before the subcommittee on Agricultural, Food and Drug, and related agencies in March. And you made some comments on there which I really liked. And your being here today, talking with us, to me, kind of reinforces your comments, and for that I appreciate your presence here.

And in there, if I may, you indicated that, as you presented the 2006 budget requests that the president had made, you indicated that the budget demonstrates the administration's unwavering commitment for the 15 nutrition and assistant programs. programs that make there is a nutrition safety net for the nation's children, elderly and low-income households. And as you go on, you indicated that the most basic level to make sure the excess must begin with making certain that sufficient resources are provided to those programs so that all who are eligible and in need can have ready access to benefits. And when you made those comments, I was just thinking, I think this program, and all the people that are associated with it, would like to see the government provide financial resources. And we, the Indian tribe have the human resources to get this program out to the people that it would most benefit.

So we can go hand in hand and address all these issues; and as we sit here today, I think one of the things that people are really concerned about is the administrative funding formula, or any other funding methodology. If we are to go to that, one thing we would like to see in there is that any annual cost fluctuation be considered, cost of living, inflation whatever here in the budget process. And then if we are going to go to a funding formula or other funding methodology, what is the date being considered for implementation? Is there a set time that you are all thinking about for implementation.

MR. BOST: No.

THOMAS YELLOW HAIR: And then I think MR. Nertoli also referred to the Food Package. I think there is a need to eliminate the one-for-one policy, where you can add one food only if you eliminate one other food. And we need to get away from that. FDPIR should have the ability to add food items at ITO's discretion and/or request upon completion of a formal process. But still we maintain that building to eliminate certain foods, if they so desire.

And another thing we considered was, considering Food Package by geographical regions. I represent the Navajo Nation. And the Navajo Nation, by tradition, has never really dealt with anything related to fish. We are out there in the middle of the desert, and if you ever see fish out there -- probably back a billion and a half years ago. So we don't deal with that. And by tradition, the Navajo people cannot really tolerate, like sweet corn. We are used to Indian corn, which is not sweet. It's a different texture and different taste. So there are certain foods that are different in different Indian tribes will not tolerate well. Maybe we need to consider food package by geographical region.

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And then there was also a comment brought up about equipment funding. Equipment funding should be given prudent consideration, because of the daily wear and tear of equipment. If not funded every year, maybe every third year for replacement consideration. In order for us to provide the food, delivery of the food, we need that equipment. Granted, we can do a lot, but there is wear and tear on the staff too. It really helps to have the proper equipment to do it. It makes it easier, quicker, facilitates the whole operation. So I think funding for that should be considered. Like I said, if not yearly, maybe every third year or something.

And then we all talk about treaties, and the different rules and regulations that are tied into it. I, as a Navajo Nation know where our treaty tribe, our treaty has been considered and approved by Congress agrees in that, and we are supposed to have the ability to negotiate. And a lot of that has been missing. So in preference FDPIR, maybe there should be a formal consultation on policy, which would be used in reference to budgeting requests and processing, which could be done maybe two years in advance, like other federal agencies. I know there are other federal agencies that go out there, two, three years in advance. ITO, what would be your funding need two or three years down the line? And once they get that, they negotiate it. And formal consultation on policy should be in reference to modification, addition, deletion, which would entail inputs from both parties, USDA and ITO. And it should be in reference to any recommended program realignments.

And then the other issue we talked about is the bison products. I think ever since I came on board with FDPIR, I've been hearing Red say, "Let's make it a permanent part of the food package." We would like to see that. I think if we make it a part of, a permanent part of the food package, that venture would let the bison-buffalo producers, whether they be Native or not Native, you know there is going to be a market out there for their product for years to come, so they'd be more inclined to meet the demand of the USDA. Fund it for one year to the next year, and it's a struggle. If a producer out there knows there is going to be a market there for their product, so they don't really make that effort to try to meet that demand. But if you make it a permanent part, that just shows them, hey, there is going to be a market for their product, and they'll work harder. That's the way we see it.

The Navajo people, we like that product. And when they had bison stew, that had less sodium and less fat than your beef stew. And our people really went for the bison stew, because the people are being educated to read those labels. And your comments, when you gave testimony, you say nutrition education, we go a long way in helping producing these healthy habits. I agree with you. We need to get the message out there, but the problem is funding. And the Navajo Nation, we only have \$1,900 this year, and we had to split that between seven warehouses. That doesn't go much by way of providing nutrition education. Granted, the Navajo Nation kicked in \$1,000, all on top of it, but that's not much for seven warehouses to work with. So, I for one, would like to see an increase in the nutrition education funding.

Our people are getting the message out there, and people are starting to listen, especially because of the obesity problem and diabetes problem, they are starting to listen. And when you have the nutrition education component, you need the funds to really run with it. And I'd like to see that. I'd like to see this FDPIR program reauthorized, because we have seen success out there. We've been able to lessen hunger on the Indian reservations, especially in the remote regions of the reservation

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like some of these people brought out. Some of our people in the remote regions, live hundreds of miles away from the nearest grocery store. One example we have in the Western Region of the Navajo Nation, it's called Tuba City, there is a tailgate service to a region called the Navajo Mountain. And it takes three hours to get-out there for those people. It takes us three hours to get out there and serve them for six hours, and another three hours to get back. (Verna Bailey arrived.)

THOMAS YELLOW HAIR: We put in 12 hours a day in that area, because those people need food, and those people will be standing out there waiting for it early in the morning, no matter the weather, if it is raining or snowing or sunshine, they'll be out there waiting for us. They are the ones that have the need, and they are the ones that are most appreciative of this program.

And then we get down in southern Arizona, where clients are not able to pick up their foods from the warehouses because of mostly medical reasons. They do door-to-door delivery. They actually take the food door to door to make sure those people have their food. And they are the ones that are appreciative of the program. And as we speak today here, because of a joint venture, we deal with a special diabetes program, and our third freezer and cooler unit is going up in the Navajo Nation. And by the end of this year, we are thinking of implementing the rice produce program among seven warehouses of the Navajo Nation. And we are doing this by joint venture, because FDPIR does not provide us funds to do it alone, so we are going in with joint ventures on that.

Beyond that we went joint venture with the State of New Mexico, which made it possible for major renovation of one food warehouse, minor renovation of another food-warehouse, and our central receiving warehouse. And then recent consideration by the state, we were able to replace two tractor-trailer units at one warehouse, and replace another tractor unit at another warehouse. We are doing this because of the need out there. And the joint ventures are very helpful in getting resources to address some of the program issues and concerns.

At the recent national convention of FDPIR, I was really glad to hear about tribal colleges providing nutritional education to tribal communities. We are the ones that are providing these services out there, and are doing this to make sure that those people get the food they need. It's a very worthwhile program. I'd like to see it reauthorized. And in order to work with this program, I've come to realize that the only way you can work with the FDPIR is if you have compassion for people, and you are willing to do whatever is necessary to get it done. And that's why I would like to see you reauthorize it, and maybe consider it for some increases. That's what I'd like to say this afternoon. Thank you, for your time.