

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 16, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington D.C. 20240

Re: 2012 American Indian Population and Labor Force Report

Dear Secretary Salazar:

The *Indian Employment, Training, and Related Services Demonstration Act of 1992* (1992 Act) requires that the Secretary of the Interior issue, not less than biannually, a report on the Indian population who are eligible for services provided by the Secretary. This report provides important information regarding the enrollment, service population, available labor force, and employed population of Indian tribes.

According to a July 2, 2012, letter from Acting Assistant Secretary Donald Laverdure to Indian tribal leaders, the 2010 report will not be issued due to “methodology inconsistencies” and the Department’s failure to provide clear direction to obtain the specific tribal information for the 2010 report. Yet since 1992, Federal law has required the Department develop, maintain, and publish the report in a consistent and reliable manner.

Moreover, Mr. Laverdure’s letter suggests that no further reports will be issued until a new survey instrument is designed after extensive consultation with Indian tribes and other Federal agencies. However, the letter fails to state when that consultation will be completed and a new report will be issued.

It is unacceptable that reports required by law to be released and the vital information contained therein are being withheld from Congress. In 2009, over \$3 billion was provided to Indian Country as part of the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA).

According to Paul Tsosie, former Chief of Staff for the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, in testimony before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs’ hearing on tribal transportation issues in September 2011, the ARRA offered a unique opportunity to make tangible improvements to Indian communities while promoting economic recovery through the preservation and creation of jobs. The Department of Interior website further explains that the Department alone is investing \$500 million in Indian communities that will enhance long-term economic development potential and promote near-term economic recovery.

These investments were purported by the Department to make a real difference in these communities where, as Mr. Laverdure testified at the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs' hearing on unemployment issues in Indian Country in January, 2010, the unemployment rate may reach as high as 80 percent. However, Mr. Laverdure contended at the same hearing that the poverty and joblessness could not be solved by a "quick fix," that is, simply investing dollars and counting jobs.

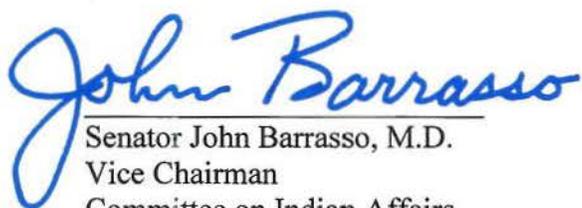
We agree that the ARRA was not a solution for growing Indian Country economies. Yet the Department is withholding information which will assist Congress and Indian tribes in evaluating the effectiveness of ARRA and economic conditions and developing strategies for long-term economic growth.

We also find unacceptable the Department's explanation that the process for developing the 2010 report was faulty. In fact, at the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs' hearing on unemployment issues in Indian Country in January 2010, Mr. Laverdure represented that the Department had provided training to Indian tribes to familiarize them with the newly revised reporting tools and how the local data should be collected. He further testified that the report would be published in a timely manner and, eventually, on an annual basis.

Despite assurances from officials within the Department of Interior that they will meet their statutory obligations, the Department has failed to comply with the reporting requirements of the 1992 Act. This failure is both a disservice to the people in Indian Country and to Members of the respective oversight committees in Congress.

We ask that you immediately release the report, or in the alternative, provide a complete explanation as to why the Department of Interior, despite prior assurances otherwise, has failed to comply with the law. We await your prompt and detailed response.

Sincerely,

  
Senator John Barrasso, M.D.  
Vice Chairman  
Committee on Indian Affairs

  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources