

**Testimony of
James Naranjo, Governor of the Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico
American Indian and Alaska Native Public Witness Hearings
House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
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Introduction. Thank you, Chairperson Simpson, Ranking Member Pingree, and Subcommittee Members for the opportunity to share our funding priorities for the FY 2026 federal budget. My name is James Naranjo and I am the Governor of the Santa Clara Pueblo in New Mexico. As discussed further below, my testimony covers various critical programs and functions within the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Bureau of Indian Education, Bureau of Reclamation, and Indian Health Service including:

- DOI: Moratorium on energy leasing in Greater Chaco Region; Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony Act; and cost match requirements
- IHS: Full funding and advance appropriations; and Special Diabetes Program for Indians
- BIA: Public safety; Criminal Investigations and Police Services; Tribal Courts; disaster recovery and prevention; Tribal Climate Resilience Program; Cooperative Landscape Conservation programs; and Emergency Response Fund
- BIE: Teacher pay parity; Tribal Education Department (TED) and Sovereignty in Education Grants; Facilities Operations; Facilities Maintenance; Indian School Equalization Program
- BOR: Implementation of the Rio Grande Pueblos Irrigation Infrastructure Act.

We are very concerned about recent policy actions that could and will adversely affect the well-being of our communities, and would like to highlight that the United States fulfills its trust and treaty obligations through both the direct delivery of Tribal programs and services and provision of federal funding to Tribal Nations and Tribal organizations serving Tribal Nations. Essential services provided by Federal employees include healthcare services through the Indian Health Service, law enforcement and public safety through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and educational services through the Bureau of Indian Education—not to mention countless other essential and legally mandated services provided by employees serving in Tribal offices and throughout the federal government. The United States further has a duty to consult government-to-government with Tribal Nations on federal actions that may have Tribal implications, including implications on delivery of trust and treaty obligations. These actions are not discretionary; they are legal obligations rooted in treaties, trust obligations, the U.S. Constitution, and long-standing federal statutes.

Background on the Santa Clara Pueblo. Santa Clara Pueblo has resided in north-central New Mexico and operated as a sovereign government since time immemorial. We have formed political relationships with foreign governments dating back to at least the 16th century, when we negotiated treaties with the Spanish conquistadores during their early explorations of the southwest. Both the Spanish Crown and the United States recognized the Pueblos' right to self-rule and declared that Pueblos be presided over by Tribal Governors with ownership of their land. While the Pueblo's proud, culturally and traditionally rich, and tragic history cannot be fully conveyed in this testimony, it is critical that Congress understands the Pueblo's background and history since it is important for fulfilling the federal government's trust responsibility.

The Pueblo has a rich cultural, spiritual and traditional connection to its homelands. Our connection to our landscape stems from our ancestral village of Puye in the Pajarito Plateau. The Pueblo's connection to its land and its natural resources forms the essence of who we are as Pueblo people across all generations: origin stories are rooted in its geographic features, our contemporary life finds sustenance in its flora and fauna, and our future generations will shape their identity and dreams in the light of its sun-drenched plateaus. We speak our traditional Tewa language, practice our religion, traditions, and cultural activities, and follow the important values taught by our elders such as respecting the landscape and respecting one another.

Our first documented contact with the outside world was in 1540 where during the Coronado Expedition Europeans find our Santa Clara people occupying Puye. Unfortunately, this contact resulted in historical trauma due to our lands being taken away, our women raped, our children and traditional leaders killed, and taxes imposed. After long periods of rule by the Spanish and Mexican government, pursuant to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico ceded the Pueblo lands to the United States with the United States continuing to recognize Pueblo property and water rights. In 1864 President Abraham Lincoln, through his agent, presented each Pueblo leader silver-headed canes of authority in recognition of the Pueblo's loyalty during the American Civil War and in recognition of each Pueblos' sovereignty. The canes continue to be passed down to incoming Governors as their symbols of authority and sovereignty.

Unfortunately, between 1848 and 1930 the Pueblo lost approximately 23% or more than 6,800 acres of our land to private land claimants due to the federal government's negligence and actions by the Pueblo Lands Board. This loss has unacceptably eroded the Pueblo's cultural and traditional identity. Today we look towards the federal government to uphold its trust responsibility as it engages with us as a sovereign tribal government in accordance with the Constitution, Supreme Court decisions, and federal law. For far too long our people have always had to justify and fight for our rights to self-govern, for the right to protect our people, lands and resources but we will continue to do so into the future.

Pay Parity for Tribal Public Safety and Teachers. The Pueblo takes great pride in recruiting and training high quality public safety officials and teachers. These positions are vital to ensuring that our community is safe for all and supports future generations. Both also play a significant role in protecting Tribal youth from the harms of Fentanyl and other illegal substances. However, the Pueblo has struggled to retain skilled individuals due to higher paying positions with the federal or state government. *We urge for increased funding to the BIA and BIE to support tribal public safety officials and teachers which establishes pay parity with federal employees.*

Funding for Tribal Law Enforcement and Courts. Tribal law enforcement and emergency services personnel strive to provide high-quality and responsive public safety services but must often do this notwithstanding the effects of serious understaffing and insufficient resources. *We urge a minimum of \$320 million for BIA Criminal Investigations and Police Services to effectively serve and protect our community, including additional resources for officer equipment, training, and innovation.*

Additionally, our Tribal Court requires additional resources to continue functioning efficiently and to address challenges related to resources, facilities, and court administration. *To strengthen our court system, we encourage the Subcommittee to maintain its commitment to public safety and justice on Tribal lands and ask for at least \$70 million for Tribal Courts (TPA).*

Provide Full and Advance Appropriations for the Indian Health Service. The Indian Health Service faces annually compounding challenges related to supplies, staffing levels, infrastructure and facilities, and high rates of negative health outcomes among AI/ANs as a result of the chronic failure to fully fund trust and treaty obligations in Indian health. We were very pleased to see the inclusion of advance appropriations for the Indian Health Service in the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023. *Santa Clara urges the Committee to support making advance appropriations permanent, expanding advance appropriations for the entirety of the four main appropriations accounts: services, facilities, contract support costs, and payments for Tribal leases, and to support a multi-billion dollar increase to achieve full funding in FY 2026.*

\$250 Million with a Self-Governance Funding Mechanism Option for the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI). *For program stability and expansion, we advocate for an increase in mandatory funding to \$250 million with automatic annual adjustments for medical inflation. We also ask that Congress authorize the use of either a grant (as currently used) or Public Law 93-638 funding mechanisms for SDPI participants consistent with Tribal sovereignty.*

Establish Cost Match Waiver for Tribes. There are many federal programs that require a tribal cost match, frequently in an amount that is beyond the means of many Tribes, resulting in Tribes not being able to take advantage of a particular program or source of funding. *Santa Clara urges the Committee to establish a blanket statutory waiver of all cost match requirements for Tribes similar to existing waivers for Insular Areas under 48 U.S.C. § 1469a (editorial note).*

\$1 Million for Funding Implementation of the Safeguard Tribal Objects of Patrimony (STOP) Act. This law assures the protection of many sensitive tribal items from illegal export. It is important to put in place the necessary resources in the federal government to enable this law to be implemented. President Trump previously articulated support for the STOP Act and was critical to its passage. *We request that at least \$1 million be allocated for FY 2026 for the purposes of implementation and enforcement of this law.*

Increase Funding for BIE Tribal Education Department (TED) and Sovereignty in Education Grants. These funds support the development of TEDs to improve educational outcomes for students and efficiencies and effectiveness in the operation of BIE-funded schools. The goal of the grants is to promote Tribal educational capacity building, which it has achieved in our community through our Department of Youth and Learning and Pueblo-operated Kha'p'o Community School. *To strengthen the exercise of sovereignty in Tribal education additional funding is needed for these grants, particularly as the TED line item has been flat funded for several appropriations cycles.*

\$200 Million for BIE Facilities Operations and \$900 Million for BIE Facilities Maintenance and Construction. To flourish academically and personally, we must provide our children with safe and vibrant classrooms and engaging areas to play, as well as with after-hours wraparound

services, but too many Tribal school facilities are in various states of disrepair. The backlog of unmet needs for these accounts has grown exponentially. *We urge full funding of this unmet need for BIE Facilities Maintenance and for Operations.*

\$600 Million for the Indian School Equalization Program (ISEP). These funds provide the core budget account for BIE-funded schools by covering teacher salaries, aides, principals, and other personnel. ISEP funds are often reallocated to cover the program cuts in other areas of education. ISEP must have adequate funding to ensure all program needs are fulfilled and must not be reduced to provide funds for new initiatives that have not been vetted by Tribes. *We strongly support an influx of investment in the ISEP in FY 2026 to at least \$ 600 million.*

Increase Funding for BIA Disaster Recovery and Prevention Programs. The stewardship of natural resources is key to both the economic and cultural well-being of Pueblo people, particularly in this era of increasing climate uncertainty. Santa Clara has been devastated by *three* catastrophic wildfires with the threat of new fires and floods always on the horizon. We have invested heavily in the development of fire preparedness and suppression resources to protect life and property. We understand the fundamental importance of beneficial partnerships with the BIA and other agencies in this effort. Because of this work, we are proud to say that Santa Clara is home to award-winning Tribal forestry and land management departments. Expanding access to BIA disaster programs and deepening the resources available is critical. *We ask for an increase across all these line items.*

\$15 Million to Establish a BIA Emergency Response Fund. Many Tribal governments are hindered by the upfront investment costs and cost-sharing requirements of certain federal emergency response programs. When coupled with bureaucratic delays in distributing funds, it often takes an unacceptable amount of time to receive disaster relief precisely when time is of the essence. We anticipate the need for these resources will only continue to grow and with quick access to funding becoming a top response need. *We recommend an initial amount of \$15 million be allocated to establish a BIA Emergency Response Fund within the Office of Trust Services.*

\$48 Million for the Tribal Climate Resilience Program and Restore Cooperative Landscape Conservation Programs. Across America, communities are facing mounting challenges related to our progressively unstable natural environment. Invasive species, disappearing tree lines, and accelerated rates of erosion are also taking an increasing toll on our agricultural and natural resources. These two Interior programs equip Tribes with the tools to manage resource stressors, develop adaptive management plans, and engage in intergovernmental coordination. *We request Congress appropriate at least \$48 million for the BIA Tribal Climate Resilience Program and restore adequate funding for Department-wide Cooperative Landscape Conservation programs.*