



Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

Discussion focused on cold cases, violent crimes, missing and murdered Native Americans

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Sacaton, AZ - Yesterday, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) held a roundtable discussion to address public safety issues confronting Indian Country. Deputy Chief of Staff exercising the authority of Deputy Secretary Kate MacGregor and Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney were joined by stakeholders from Indian Country. The meeting focused on developing a comprehensive approach to concentrate on cold cases, violent crimes, and missing and murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives.

“Women are the pillars of a family and when they are taken from us, the impact of that loss echoes through generations. The Trump Administration is committed to partnering with American Indian and Alaska Native communities to better ensure safety and economic prosperity in Indian Country so that families and communities may thrive and endure,” **said Kate MacGregor, DOI Deputy Chief of Staff exercising the authority of Deputy Secretary.**

“Today was about hearing from tribal leadership, Indian Country, advocates, and communities,” **said Tara Sweeney, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.** “This is a priority for the Department and the Trump Administration. We need to stop the escalating cycle of violence for our Native communities.”

“At HHS’ Administration for Children and Families, I have been working with our Office of Trafficking in Persons, Children’s Bureau and Family and Youth Services Bureau to address this important issue. Through our programs, we are bringing awareness to human trafficking victims, runaway and homeless youth, domestic violence victims and children living in foster care who may have a higher risk to becoming part of the tragic reality of missing and murdered indigenous people,” **said Jeannie Hovland, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Native Americans and Commissioner of the Administration on Native Americans.** “We know these are some of our most vulnerable populations, and our administration is committed to ending this tragedy.”

“Native American communities, particularly indigenous women, face much higher rates of violence versus the national average. Alarming, law enforcement officials in Indian Country often lack access to the data and resources necessary to prosecute and prevent these crimes. We must do more to ensure public safety in our Native communities. This is why I am proud to work with my colleagues on the Senate Indian Affairs Committee on legislation to give tribal law enforcement the tools they need by expanding access to federal criminal data bases, streamlining recruitment and retention procedures, and supporting best practices for investigating and prosecuting cases in Indian country,” **said U.S. Senator Martha McSally.**

“The Gila River Indian Community was honored to host this important discussion on ‘Reclaiming our Native Communities.’ The safety of our tribal citizens is the responsibility of all of our governments -

tribal, state and federal. We are encouraged that Assistant Secretary Sweeney and [exercising the authority of the] Deputy Secretary MacGregor have decided to make domestic violence prevention, solutions to our missing and murdered Native Americans and reinvigorating examination of unresolved cold cases a priority and shine a light on policies and programs that are working well as well as place a focus on gaps that need to be addressed. We are looking forward to working with the Administration as they take the next steps on this important initiative,” **said Stephen Lewis, Gila River Indian Community Governor.**

“I am honored to have been included in this important roundtable discussion to begin the conversation about our murdered and missing relatives. I look forward to continued dialogue which leads to meaningful action to ensure safety and accountability on these issues,” **said Nicole Matthews, Director for Minnesota Indian Sexual Assault Coalition Executive.**

Members of the listening session included Gila River Indian Community Governor Stephan Lewis, Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation President Bernadine Burnette, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community President Martin Harvier, Colorado River Indian Tribes Chairman Dennis Patch, Pascua Yaqui Tribe Chairman Robert Valencia, Tohono O’odham Nation Chairman Edward Manuel, Ak-Chin Indian Community Chairman Robert Miguel, San Carlos Apache Tribe Chairman Terry Rambler, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Violence Against Women Task Force Co-Chair, Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska Supreme Court Chief Justice, and Confederated Tribes of Chehalis Reservation Chief Judge Michelle Demmert, Cook Inlet Tribal Council President Gloria O’Neill, Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition Executive Director Nicole Matthews, Oglala Sioux Tribe President Julian Bear Runner, Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation Chairman Mark Fox, Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Chairman Raymond Tsumpti, NCAI Regional Vice President Quitin Lopez, and staff from the Office of Governor Doug Ducey and Office of U.S. Senator Martha McSally.

Prior to the roundtable, Assistant Secretary Sweeney and MacGregor toured On Eagle’s Wings, a domestic violence shelter with Governor Lewis.

Background

President Trump designated May 5 as Missing and Murdered American Indians and Alaska Natives Awareness Day to draw attention to the horrible acts of violence committed against American Indian and Alaska Native people, particularly women and children.

President Trump’s proclamation read: “Ending the violence that disproportionately affects American Indian and Alaska Native communities is imperative. Under my Administration, Federal agencies are working more comprehensively and more collaboratively to address violent crime in Indian country, to recover the American Indian and Alaska Native women and children who have gone missing, and to find justice for those who have been murdered.”

American Indian and Alaska Native people face alarming levels of violence. Data from the National Institute of Justice and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that more than 1.5 million American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced violence, including sexual violence, in their lifetimes. American Indian and Alaska Native children attempt and commit suicide at rates far higher than those in any other demographic in our Nation, and often endure disproportionately high rates of endemic drug abuse, violence, and crime.

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