

[U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs](#)  
**Nomination Hearing: William Kirkland as Asst. Secretary for Indian Affairs**  
**17 July 2025**

**Highlights:**

- If confirmed, William Kirkland promised to use his first 90 days listening to Tribal leaders and Congress on priority areas for the BIA.
- Mentions of DOI probate backlogs impacting Indian Country were highlighted, while Kirkland was questioned on delayed funds from already appropriated dollars to Tribes.

**Witness:**

- [William Kirkland – nominee for DOI Asst. Secretary of Indian Affairs](#)

**Summary:**

Significant portions of the discussion centered on public safety and law enforcement issues in Tribal communities, with a few notable points covering Indian Country food and agriculture-related issues.

In his written testimony, Kirkland, a Navajo Nation citizen, mentioned that if confirmed he would spend his first 90 days listening to Tribal leaders and the Congressional Committees of jurisdiction to understand top priorities and develop a clear action plan for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This did not specifically mention Tribal consultations or listening sessions.

Several senators discussed significant law enforcement shortfalls under the BIA across Indian Country, which Kirkland acknowledged that a \$3 billion unmet need for Tribal public safety and the 11,000-officer staffing shortfall would be something he would work to address if confirmed.

Senator Steve Daines (R-MT) asked Kirkland about solving water rights issues, specifically mentioning the 100+ year Ft. Belknap Reservation water rights agreement that remains unsettled.

Chairwoman Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) highlighted the BIA's ongoing 48,000-case probate backlog and calling it an "injustice," with Kirkland promising to work with DOI Secretary Doug Burgum to address it with the tools at the department's disposal.

Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) also asked Kirkland about the delay for many Tribes on the fish hatchery funds appropriated as part of the Inflation Reduction Act, asking why the 20+ Tribes eligible for this program had not received their funding allocation. Kirkland didn't directly respond to that but did say that the bureau's processes for disbursing funds needed to be reviewed.

Chairwoman Murkowski closed the hearing out discussing Congress' work on a recent rescission package but also highlighted senators' frustrations with hearing about funding disbursement delays from already-appropriated funds.