

Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee  
**Budget Hearing- Interior Department**  
**April 29, 2026**

**Witness:** Mr. Doug Burgum, Secretary- Department of Interior

**Highlights:**

The hearing reviewed the FY27 Interior Department budget, with debate over expanding energy and mineral development, reorganizing wildfire management, and reducing or restructuring funding for national parks, conservation, and water programs. Senators raised concerns about impacts on Tribal trust responsibilities, water rights settlements, drought and agriculture, and permitting fairness, while Interior officials emphasized efficiency, energy production, revenue generation, and maintaining core services.

**Key points:**

- Federal trust responsibility and Tribal engagement
  - Secretary Burgum stated that the FY27 Interior budget prioritizes upholding federal trust obligations and maintaining government-to-government relationships with all 575 federally recognized Tribes, with commitments to consultation, transparency, and ongoing engagement.
- Probate backlog and trust funds
  - Secretary Burgum noted a backlog of approximately 47,000 unresolved Indian probate cases, with nearly \$700 million held in trust for Tribal families.
    - The Department reported efforts to reduce the backlog using process reforms and technology tools.
- Tribal economic impacts of leasing and resource development
  - Interior officials stated that revenues from federal energy leasing—including recent Alaska lease sales—are shared with states and Tribes, with specific reference to economic opportunities for Alaska Native communities in the North Slope region.
- Tribal water rights and settlements
  - Senators raised concerns about funding Tribal water rights settlements, stressing deadlines tied to enforceability of agreements.
    - Interior acknowledged the importance of these settlements but indicated the need for further internal review on specific cases.
- Indian Self-Determination and data collaboration
  - Use of Tribal compacts under the Indian Self-Determination Act (638) was discussed as a way to improve data collection (such as stream gauges) and resource monitoring in remote Tribal areas.
- Water availability for agriculture

- Western drought conditions and reduced snowpack were repeatedly raised as threats to water reliability for farmers and ranchers, particularly in Colorado River Basin states.
  - Senators emphasized impacts on irrigation, crop planning, and production uncertainty.
- Cuts to water conservation and agricultural efficiency programs
  - Multiple Senators criticized the proposed reduction or elimination of [Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART](#) and related programs, which support agricultural water conservation, reuse, and efficiency improvements.
- Wild horse management impacts on grazing lands
  - Overpopulation of wild horses on federal lands was discussed as affecting rangeland health, local ranchers, and rural economies, with Interior pledging to resume management actions consistent with law.
- Rural water infrastructure
  - Senators highlighted the importance of federal investment in rural water systems and irrigation projects, framing them as essential to agricultural viability and public health in rural communities.
- Agricultural cost pressures
  - Rising input costs—including diesel fuel, fertilizer, and uncertainty in commodity markets—were raised as ongoing challenges for farmers deciding whether to plant for the coming season.