

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

July 29, 2026

Legislative Hearing

- [S.3573](#), A bill to amend the Aamodt Litigation Settlement Act to modify a provision relating to the extension of certain dates for the completion of the Regional Water System, and for other purposes.
- [S.3617](#), Yavapai Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Act of 2026
- [S.4368](#), Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Water Rights Settlement Act
- [S.4417](#), Pechanga Band of Indians Water Rights Settlement Technical Amendments Act
- [S.4890](#), Protecting Indian Water Rights Settlements Act of 2026

Highlights:

- Committee members, Tribal leaders, and officials from the Department of the Interior discussed the importance of resolving longstanding Tribal water claims, securing reliable water supplies, and fulfilling federal trust responsibilities. The hearing also focused on the growing challenge of financing water settlements, which could require nearly \$13 billion in new federal spending across pending settlement legislation.

Key points:

- S. 3573: Aamodt (AMAFCA) Litigation Settlement Act Amendments
 - The bill would allow settlement parties to extend the deadline for completing the Pojoaque Basin Regional Water System when all parties agree that additional time is necessary.
 - [Senator Ben Ray Luján \(D-NM\)](#) emphasized that the bill serves as a technical fix and does not increase federal costs.
 - The Department of the Interior supported the legislation because existing funding will not allow completion of the project by the current 2028 deadline.
 - Witnesses agreed that the amendment would provide flexibility and help maximize the usefulness of existing federal funding.
- S. 3617 - Yavapai Apache Nation Water Rights Settlement Act
 - [Senator Mark Kelly \(D-AZ\)](#) stated that the settlement would provide a long-term water supply for the Yavapai Apache Nation and protect the Verde River by reducing groundwater pumping.
 - [Chairman of the Yavapai Apache Nation Buddy Rocha](#) testified that declining groundwater supplies threaten the Nation's ability to build housing, support

economic development, and sustain cultural practices. He also stated that the project would help address regional groundwater depletion and benefit both the Nation and surrounding communities.

- The Department of the Interior questioned the cost estimates because the project has not undergone a full feasibility study.
 - Interior officials expressed concern that the proposed pipeline may exceed the Nation's water needs and could provide substantial benefits to non-Tribal users.
- Committee members focused heavily on the need for more accurate project estimates and stronger justification for the proposed infrastructure size and cost.
- S. 4368 - Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Water Rights Settlement Act
 - [Senator Alex Padilla \(D-CA\)](#) described the bill as the result of years of negotiations following a federal court decision recognizing Tribal groundwater rights.
 - Chairman of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, [Jeff Grubbe](#), explained that the settlement would secure the Tribe's groundwater rights and give the Tribe a greater role in regional groundwater management.
 - The Department of the Interior raised concerns about the size of the federal contribution and several technical provisions in the bill.
 - Committee members closely examined provisions that would allow the Tribe to collect certain taxes currently collected by Riverside County.
 - Interior officials cautioned that the tax provisions could create broader precedent for Tribal and local government taxation issues.
 - Chairman Grubbe argued that the provisions reflect the unique circumstances of the Coachella Valley and would allow the Tribe to invest directly in local water and community needs.
- S. 4417 - Pechanga Band of Indians Water Rights Settlement Technical Amendments Act
 - Senator Padilla (D-CA) stated that the bill would update the existing settlement without changing the Tribe's underlying water rights.
 - [Council Member Catalina Chacon](#) explained that the current settlement prevents the Tribe from using its recognized water rights on some newly acquired trust lands. Chacon also noted that the settlement's water quality provisions need updating to address modern contaminants such as PFAS.
 - The Department of the Interior supported the legislation because it would improve implementation without requiring additional federal funding.

- Witnesses consistently characterized the bill as a narrow technical correction rather than a substantive expansion of Tribal water rights.
- S. 4890 - Protecting Indian Water Rights Settlements Act
 - Members of the committee discussed growing concerns about how Congress will fund pending Tribal water settlements that could require nearly \$13 billion in federal spending.
 - Senator Ray Luján (D-NM) argued that Congress needs a dedicated funding source to meet federal trust and treaty obligations to Tribes.
 - [Vice Chairman Brian Schatz](#) stated that Congress must ensure settlements receive adequate funding so that recognized water rights translate into actual water delivery.
 - The Department of the Interior acknowledged the funding challenge but continued to favor annual appropriations over mandatory spending.
 - Members from both parties agreed that the current funding system does not adequately support existing and future Tribal water settlements.