

**Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs  
Oversight Hearing  
1334 Longworth House Office Building  
November 14, 2023**

***“Opportunities and Challenges for Improving Public Safety in Tribal Communities”***

**Questions from Rep. Westerman for Hon. Lloyd Goggles, Chairman, Arapaho Business Council, Northern Arapaho Tribe:**

1. At the hearing you were able to explain further about how fentanyl and other illicit narcotics have had a detrimental impact at Wind River Reservation.
  - a. Please provide any further information that you think the Committee should know about this issue for the reservation.

**Answer:** The pervasive presence of fentanyl remains a significant concern within the reservation. The effects are detrimental. Tragically, lives have been lost and severe disruption within families has been experienced due to fentanyl and other substances. The escalating prevalence not only further restricts our already constrained resources for public safety and public health, but also demoralizes our people. Thus, it is imperative that we remain committed to limiting and ultimately eliminating the presence of illegal fentanyl on the reservation. The Drug Liaison position would help with this issue.

- b. If the tribe(s) were able to support a Drug Liaison position, how would that impact the ongoing illicit drug crisis on the Wind River Reservation?

**Answer:** Establishing a Drug Liaison position would aid tribal law enforcement in prioritizing the monitoring and enforcing of drug control laws within our community. Presently, the absence of dedicated personnel focused on drug control hinders our visibility into these critical issues.

For instance, consider the frequent occurrence of non-drug violations on the reservation, such as trespass. Addressing these incidents demands significant resources and leads to the diversion of focus and funding away from drug-related law enforcement efforts. This designated position would help change the current dynamic and facilitate the proactive implementation of a systematic approach for gathering intelligence and investigating both known and potential drug-related offenses.

Moreover, the appointment of a liaison officer would enhance the relationship with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and other law enforcement agencies. The Drug Liaison could function as a central point of contact for drug-related infractions, providing valuable insights into the cultural and communal aspects intertwined with drug control issues. This proactive engagement empowers the tribe to assume a leading role in overseeing and upholding drug laws within the reservation, an assertion of greater sovereignty.

While reinstating the Drug Liaison position would be a step in the right direction, it must also be noted that there would still be more to do. Ultimately, drug enforcement is a communal effort. Tackling illicit drug issues requires strong and organized law enforcement, broadly. No one position will be the solution.

2. Your testimony discussed community solutions that included a return to BIA officers being more regular and visible on the reservation and establishing further training for BIA personnel on the culture and history of the tribes they serve.
  - a. What impact would an increased, and visible police force have on the Wind River Reservation and what would that practically look like in day-to-day actions on the reservation?

**Answer:** Based on the most recent data available to us, BIA currently has 22 officers stationed to the Wind River Reservation. We also understand the agency is looking to fill four more positions, a total of 26 officers. However, the existing approach concerning the territorial assignments of BIA officers have led to notable challenges.

First, the deployment of 22 officers falls short in effectively monitoring our expansive community. Tasked with surveilling a reservation spanning across 2.2 million acres, or 3,532 square miles, BIA officers struggle tremendously with triaging their forces to address the most urgent matters. More personnel are imperative to meet the needs of our community.

Second, even when fully staffed, the BIA often reassigns officers to other areas once capacity is met in our region. This is due to the agency-wide shortage. Consequently, officers frequently spend only limited time here before being transferred elsewhere. This practice significantly complicates the rapport between BIA officers and our community. The transient nature of officer tenure inhibits the establishment of substantial, enduring relationships and a deep understanding of the community's needs.

An increase in officers, enough officers to be present in the community more continuously, would change the current dynamic. This change means more and improved longstanding relationships with Tribal law enforcement, more and improved longstanding relationships with the Tribal governments, increased casual interactions with the Northern Arapaho people, officer presence in schools, shops, and on street corners. The change also means community members having day-to-day interactions with BIA, rather than only interacting with them when there is an emergency or a problem. This approach encourages harmony and creates familiarity.

- b. How can the tribe assist the Bureau of Indian Affairs in providing increased cultural training regimen for officers?

**Answer:** This is a land of mixed cultures, and it is imperative that we foster mutual understanding. The Northern Arapaho people, of course, possess deep expertise in our cultural heritage, and welcome all that want to learn and understand more. We stand ready to contribute by offering valuable cultural sensitivity training sessions.

Indeed, our tribe has supported Northern Arapaho participation in cultural training before. However, while we have previously offered to conduct training, some former BIA chiefs have declined our offer. This training ought to be mandatory, rather than optional. Officers and agencies having adequate familiarity with the communities they serve is too important to be discretionary.

To that end, I suggest a Tribal component of Wind River Cares. Previously, Wind River Cares was slated to conduct a cultural competency training for local police jurisdictions. Regrettably, this training did not come to fruition.

The Wind River Cares training, and others like it, could help federal, state, and local law enforcement in the following ways: (1) by creating shared understanding of the cultural nuances, traditions, and customs of the community; (2) participating in the training led by tribal members helps build trust and familiarity from the very beginning of service; (3) it potentially increases the effectiveness of communication because of the shared understanding and deliberate relationship building; and (4) it will help reduce any biases, stereotypes, and preconceived notions about the tribe.

3. How has your tribe supplemented resources and funding that BIA provides for public justice services in your communities? And are there other funds or resources you've leveraged in your communities?

**Answer:** BIA plays a pivotal role in delivering direct services through officer support within our tribal community. Accordingly, any tribal supplement related to public safety or public justice provided by the Northern Arapaho is typically in the form of private security arrangements facilitated by the tribe itself. For instance, the tribe regularly engages private security services to ensure enhanced safety and orderliness during significant public gatherings such as Tribal Council assemblies.

Moreover, the tribe regularly employs private security personnel to oversee and safeguard large-scale public cultural events, such as the revered Sun Dance ceremony. The utilization of private security personnel during these occasions serves multiple purposes, including crowd management, ensuring the sanctity and security of cultural practices, and upholding the overall safety and well-being of attendees.

4. What actions at a tribal, state, local, or federal level do you think can increase cooperation between law enforcement agencies? And what is your tribe doing to increase that capacity for the BIA officers for your reservation?

**Answer:** There are several actions that can be taken to increase cooperation between law enforcement agencies. For instance, many of the above-mentioned suggestions, including more BIA officers deployed to the Wind River Reservation, a more robust tribal police force presence, and better cultural understanding between officers and tribes, would all encourage increased cooperation between agencies. Additionally, there are two other measures that would be of benefit and encourage cooperation: (1) seamless cross deputization for tribal law enforcement officers and (2) well defined exterior boundaries of the reservation.

As the subcommittee is aware, cross deputization for tribal law enforcement necessitates cooperation between agencies and empowers tribal law enforcement departments. It can provide for better communication and collaboration by hosting joint trainings, sharing resources, and coordinating responses to criminal activities or emergencies. The state legislature has previously put forward bills to address cross-deputization, and the Northern Arapaho Tribe supports these bills. However, we have a shared reservation and need the support of our tribal counterparts.

Additionally, defining exterior boundaries of the reservation also helps with coordination and collaboration. Well defined demarcation of the reservation's boundaries helps law enforcement departments understand their respective jurisdictions. This reduces confusion, in turn encouraging better communication and cooperation.