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Cartels infiltrating native reservations with fentanyl: Tribal leader

- "They know we're short-staffed," the Fort Belknap president said
- Underfunded police overwhelmed by drug running, violence on tribal lands
- Leader: "\$95 billion to kill people overseas but can't spare pennies"



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Jeffrey Stiffarm, president of the [Fort Belknap Indian Community](#), testified that the Sinaloa Cartel operates with near impunity in his region, capitalizing on chronic underfunding of law enforcement on the 652,000-acre reservation patrolled by just nine officers.

“We are fighting a losing battle. The cartels are winning, the drug dealers are winning,” Stiffarm told Congress. “We are left alone to fight this battle against them.”

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Stiffarm told “NewsNation Prime” that up to hundreds of thousands of cartel operatives have infiltrated reservations across the American West, using the isolated lands as havens to traffic fentanyl pills and other drugs into the United States without scrutiny from federal authorities.

“They know we’re short-staffed, underfunded, under-trained and outnumbered,” said Stiffarm, a former law enforcement officer for two decades. “They’re preying on our people, our children, our women. They get a foothold in and they’re here.”

The Fort Belknap leader described cartel tactics like staging fake emergencies to divert the limited police presence, then quickly shuttling narcotics across other parts of the reservation undercover.

But the devastation transcends drug running, as cartel operatives deeply embed themselves in tribal communities grappling with [70% unemployment rates](#) and that are hours from urban centers. Stiffarm said rapes and murders committed by cartels have become tragically commonplace.

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Stiffarm said federal agencies including the FBI, Border Patrol and Bureau of Indian Affairs have failed to intervene, paralyzed by jurisdictional gaps that cartel operatives expertly exploit. The [Belknap law enforcement budget](#) has only grown from \$1.2 million to \$1.3 million since 1997, according to Stiffarm.

"We're the first people of this country, and we're always overlooked, pushed aside," Stiffarm said referring to the [foreign aid bill](#) Congress passed Saturday. "They send \$95 billion to kill people overseas but can't spare pennies to save their own on reservations being ravaged by cartels."

Stiffarm, who said he feared retaliation from cartels, made the appeal in hopes of finally receiving backup to combat forces he warned are overtaking tribal lands across the northern plains.

"If it's at the risk of my own life, then so be it," he said. "That's my job – to protect our people."

CARTELS

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