

TAOS PUEBLO

Governor Michael E. Martinez

Tribal Secretary Cameron Martinez

Prepared Statements

Before Federal Funding Stabilization Subcommittee

August 4, 2026

Good morning, Madame Chair, Co-Chair, Members of the Subcommittee, Legislative Staff and Guests.

My name is Michael Martinez. I am the Governor at Taos Pueblo, and I want to welcome you to the traditional homelands of my People. We have occupied this area for hundreds of years. We are the oldest Pueblo in northern New Mexico. Our traditional form of government is sound and still in place. Our Tiwa language, our cultural ceremonies, and belief systems are still strong. We have a long and varied history of dealing with foreign governments such as Spain and Mexico. Unlike other tribes in the United States, the status of our lands including other Pueblo trust lands is unique. They fall under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.

We have maintained a strong government-to-government relationship with both the federal government and the State of New Mexico. It is a relationship built on mutual respect and understanding. We look forward to working with the state legislature and the new administration when they officially take over in January.

With that, I want to turn over this part of our presentation to Taos Tribal Secretary Cameron Martinez. He is also an appointed tribal official at the Pueblo and will share some of our concerns and issues with the federal government.

Thank you.

TAOS PUEBLO

Tribal Secretary Cameron Martinez
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Good morning, Madame Chair, Co-Chair, Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Cameron Martinez. I am the Taos Tribal Secretary. I was appointed this year to serve with Governor Martinez and other tribal leaders at the Pueblo.

I want to thank the Committee for allowing us time to share some of our concerns and issues that are the result of recent federal actions and decisions made by the current administration. They include funding cuts, a reduction in federal agency staff, and changes in federal policy that have affected service delivery.

However, I would like to start with a brief history of our relationship with the federal government. It's a history that's unique, complex and requires some knowledge and understanding.

1st Item - Government-to-Government Relationship:

- Our relationship with the U.S. Government is historic. Much of our current relationship is the result of federal actions, decision, and events that have occurred over the past 250 years.
- First, the U.S. Constitution acknowledges that Indian Nations, Tribes, and the Pueblos are separate, distinct governments within our federalist system.
- Dozens of U.S. Supreme Court decisions and hundreds of treaties, executive orders, and federal laws and regulations reaffirm the governmental status of Indian tribes.
- They form the unique relationship between the United States and tribal governments including Taos Pueblo.
- In addition, the history of the government-to-government relationship between the Pueblos and the United States federal government is captured symbolically in the Lincoln canes that each Pueblo Governor carries.
- The canes were presented to us by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863 as symbols of our authority.

2nd Item - Roots of the Federal Government-to-Government Relationship:

- This federal relationship with all tribes and the Pueblos has occurred primarily in modern times under a number of Republican Presidents.
- They supported and signed off on major Native American legislation, and Native American policy positions including tribal consultation.

- The policy positions detail the requirements and the process for carrying out government-to-government consultation and the purpose.

3rd Item - Executive Orders:

- What has been important to tribes are the long-standing Executive Orders that require regular, meaningful consultation between the Administration and all federally recognized tribes.
- They are meant to focus on matters that could impact tribal governments and tribal communities.
- Consultation can also help reduce the possibility of unfunded federal mandates being forced on Indian tribes.
- These Executive Orders require federal agencies to meaningfully consult with Indian tribes prior to putting policies in place that could adversely affect tribal governments.
- In addition, these Executive Orders provide Pueblo leaders the opportunity to meet directly with federal agencies and federal officials with the Interior Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Bureau of Indian Education, the Indian Health Service, BLM and the Forest Service among others.
- This consultation process goes to the heart of the federal government's trust responsibility to tribes. It is a legal and moral obligation by the federal government.
- This is not to say there haven't been wrongful acts committed by the federal government such as the illegal taking of tribal lands, or taking control of cultural sites, like our Sacred Blue Lake in 1906, or forcing our children into federal border schools. Blue Lake was returned to us in 1970 after a long, hard-fought legal battle with the federal government. Most of our students now attend local public schools.

4th Item - Tribal Consultation Today:

- The consultation process I have outlined is not perfect, but it is one that Pueblos, nations, and tribes have used to forge a strong government-to-government relationship with the U.S. Government.
- We have urged the Trump Administration to continue the practice of meaningful tribal consultation and communication.
- This practice has been carried out by prior administrations and by former Presidents, who have been intent on recognizing and respecting the Indigenous people of America and their sovereign governments.
- These principles are not simply historical. They continue to shape how Taos Pueblo works with the federal government today. Recent federal funding decisions, staffing reductions, and policy changes have affected our ability to plan for the future, carry out long-term projects, and deliver essential services to our community. I would like to highlight a few examples.

5th Item - Federal Grant Administration and Funding Stability:

- The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has proposed significant changes to the federal rules that govern grants and cooperative agreements across nearly every federal agency.
- These changes could affect how federal funding is awarded, managed, and overseen by Tribal governments.
- For Tribal governments like ours, predictable federal funding is essential because many projects take years to plan, construct, and complete.
- While the Administration has said the proposal is intended to strengthen accountability and oversight, it also creates uncertainty for recipients that depend on long-term federal partnerships.
- Taos Pueblo, like many tribal governments, relies on stable and predictable federal funding to carry out the federal trust responsibility and implement long-term projects.
- Many Tribal investments, including water infrastructure, public safety, broadband, healthcare, education, and economic development, are planned over many years.
- When federal funding policies become uncertain or change significantly, it becomes more difficult for the Pueblo to plan responsibly, complete long-term projects, and fulfill the services our community depends upon.
- We support responsible stewardship of federal funds while encouraging continued government-to-government consultation before significant changes to federal funding policies are finalized.

The following are several examples of how these federal actions have affected Taos Pueblo:

6th Item - Land and Natural Resources - Important Tribal Assets

- The stewardship of land and other natural resources is key to both the economic well-being of Taos Pueblo and our cultural survival.
- The historical and spiritual connection of Taos Pueblo to federal lands that border our homelands was never extinguished.
- Federal laws acknowledge the continued right of tribes to access federal lands to pray, conduct ceremonies, and gather medicinal plants and other natural resources.
- Taos Pueblo has asked the Trump Administration to partner with us in strengthening these rights and to allow continued access to ancestral homelands and sacred places located on federal lands.
- Federal laws and Executive Orders also require federal land managers to consult with tribal governments prior to taking action that would affect federal lands that share a common border with our homelands.
- Taos Pueblo and other tribes are proven stewards and managers of their lands and forests. Protecting our lands and natural resources is important not only for the Pueblo but for all citizens in our state.

7th Item - Affirming Taos Water Rights and Water Quality.

- Taos Pueblos has been engaged in major efforts to negotiate and secure our water rights as provided under federal law.
- We have consistently urged the federal government to remain committed to implementing our federally approved water rights settlement by providing the funding necessary to complete it.
- The Taos Pueblo Indian Water Rights Settlement Act established the framework for resolving the Pueblo's water rights, but completing the settlement depends on continued federal investment in the remaining infrastructure and mitigation projects.
- Congress is considering additional federal legislation to provide the resources needed to complete those projects and fulfill the commitments made through the settlement.
- Completing the settlement will strengthen long-term water reliability, support economic development, and provide lasting benefits for Taos Pueblo, neighboring communities throughout the Taos Valley, and the State of New Mexico.
- I want to emphasize that Taos Pueblo water rights are not just claims on a piece of paper, but reflect our long, historic presence in this area, as well as our cultural identity and desire to live on our traditional, ancestral lands.
- For these reasons, our land, watersheds, our sacred Blue Lake, and air must be protected from contamination, especially from potential wildland fires.
- We have urged federal agencies to provide the necessary funding and other resources for fire prevention. This includes funding for vehicles, equipment, hiring and training firefighting crews, so we can partner with the state and local governments to put protections in place. We are still waiting for a federal response.
- Ultimately, fulfilling the federal government's commitments under the Taos Pueblo Water Rights Settlement is not only part of its trust responsibility to our Pueblo. It is an investment in the long-term water security, economic vitality, and resilience of communities throughout Taos Valley and the State of New Mexico.

8th Item - Loss of Federal Broadband Funding:

- One recent example of how changing federal priorities have affected Taos Pueblo involves broadband infrastructure.
- We have been very aware of the need for digital infrastructure to make broadband and the Internet accessible for our Pueblo government to function, for our school to provide sound educational opportunities, and for our families to maintain consistent communication beyond tribal boundaries.
- Taos Pueblo completed the planning necessary to move a major broadband infrastructure project forward before the federal funding decision changed.
- We know this infrastructure can bridge the gap in this modern age of technology. But without sufficient funding that digital divide can't be filled.

- Unfortunately, we lost millions of dollars in federal Broadband funding. The Trump administration recently cut \$34 million in funding due to “the change in NTIA’s broader broadband infrastructure strategies.”
- Now, our tribal programs have been unable to fully access information, important data and research. Our high school and college students who have been taking education courses on-line and families who use the Internet for critical medical care must wait.
- We know that better access to broadband, Internet services, and digital platforms are essential for business development and important for the Pueblo’s economic well-being. But again, we must wait.
- We must now apply through state broadband funds and support to create this reality for our community.

Closing:

The future of Taos Pueblo is closely tied to the future of the Taos Valley and the State of New Mexico. The challenges I have shared today cannot be solved by one government alone. They require partnership among local communities, Pueblo and Tribal governments, the State of New Mexico, and our federal partners. By working together, we can build stronger communities, create greater economic opportunity, and ensure a more resilient future for all New Mexicans.

Madame Chair and members of the Subcommittee, I will end my comments here. Again, Governor Martinez and I want to thank you for listening to us, and for allowing us the time to broaden your understanding of our issues and concerns. Thank you.