

Department of the Interior Self-Governance Advisory Committee (DOI SGAC)
Wednesday - Thursday, February 25-26, 2026
Embassy Suites Convention Center, Washington, DC

MEETING MINUTES

DAY ONE – WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026

Formal SGAC Meeting Convened

The formal SGAC meeting was convened at approximately 2:00 p.m.

Opening Prayer

Raymond Loretto of the Pueblo of Jemez provided the opening invocation and welcomed participants in a spirit of unity, cooperation, and service to Tribal communities.

Welcome and Introductions

Chairman W. Ron Allen, Tribal Chairman/CEO of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and Tribal Chair for the DOI SGAC, welcomed participants and convened the meeting.

Roll call was conducted by region. A quorum was confirmed.

Committee Business

Approval of New SGAC Representatives

Chairman Allen presented nominations for new SGAC representation, including:

- Victoria Kitcheyan of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska to represent the Great Plains Region; and
- Tasha Mousseau of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes to replace John "Rocky" Barrett as Eastern Oklahoma representative.

A representative of the Quinault Nation moved to approve both nominations. The motion received a second. No objections were raised.

Action Taken

The motion carried unanimously by consensus voice vote.

Chairman Allen welcomed both representatives to the SGAC and acknowledged their experience and continued service in Tribal Self-Governance matters.

Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes

The committee reviewed draft minutes from the December 2025 SGAC meeting.

A motion was made to approve the minutes as presented. The motion received a second. No objections were raised. **Action Taken:** The December 2025 SGAC meeting minutes were unanimously approved by a voice vote.

Opening Remarks from Indian Affairs Leadership

Indian Affairs leadership welcomed participants and reaffirmed the federal government's commitment to Tribal Self-Governance and the government-to-government relationship.

Leadership acknowledged ongoing operational challenges caused by staffing transitions, budget pressures, and federal restructuring, and emphasized continued support for Tribal Self-Governance operations.

Participants discussed the importance of maintaining transparency and communication during ongoing organizational and staffing changes within the Department of the Interior.

Dialogue with Indian Affairs Leadership **Assistant Secretary William "Billy" Kirkland**

Assistant Secretary Billy Kirkland reaffirmed the Administration's commitment to expanding Tribal Self-Governance, emphasizing that decisions and resources should increasingly be placed in the hands of Tribal governments rather than managed from Washington. He cited the experience during the recent federal shutdown as evidence that Self-Governance Tribes were generally better positioned to maintain operations than direct service Tribes, reinforcing the Administration's goal of encouraging additional Tribal participation in Self-Governance.

Leadership stressed that current organizational changes and workforce efficiency efforts are intended to improve service delivery rather than reduce Tribal authority. The Department also emphasized the importance of showcasing successful Tribal Self-Governance examples to encourage additional Tribes to participate.

Tribal Priorities Raised

Committee members highlighted several issues they believe require continued Departmental attention, including:

- Future direction of the Tribal Budget and Investment Committee (TBIC).
- Continued operation of the Self-Governance Advisory Committee structure.
- Transfer of Department of Education programs to Interior.
- Timely payment of Contract Support Costs (CSC).
- Timely payment of Section 105(l) lease obligations.
- Staffing and leadership within the Office of Self-Governance.

- Continued expansion of Tribal Self-Governance authorities.

Tribal Interior Budget Council (TBIC)

Department leadership announced plans to redesign the TBIC process.

Instead of a traditional budget meeting, the Department intends to convene a two-day session focused on:

- Reviewing the upcoming budget.
- Conducting a comprehensive discussion regarding the future structure of TBIC.

Topics expected for discussion include:

- Meeting frequency.
- Regional representation.
- Breakout session structure.
- Budget priorities.
- Opportunities to improve Tribal participation.

Federal officials emphasized that they intend to gather significant Tribal feedback before making long-term structural changes.

Education Transition

Discussion focused on the proposed transfer of several Department of Education programs to the Department of the Interior.

Federal leadership emphasized:

- Funding would continue through the Department of Education during the transition.
- No interruption of services is anticipated.
- Bureau of Indian Education leadership has demonstrated measurable improvements in graduation rates and student outcomes.
- Interior believes Tribal education programs will benefit from closer alignment with Tribal priorities and culture.

Committee members expressed concern regarding:

- Title VI funding.
- Johnson-O'Malley.
- Impact Aid.
- Tribal Colleges and Universities.
- McKinney-Vento programs.
- Language preservation grants.
- Funding formulas.

- Adequacy of Tribal consultation.

Federal leadership acknowledged these concerns and indicated that future consultation would continue while exploring opportunities to modernize funding formulas.

Public Safety

Public safety was discussed during the meeting.

Committee members raised concerns regarding:

- Tribal law enforcement funding.
- Coordination with the Department of Homeland Security.
- ICE activities affecting Tribal communities.
- Tribal jurisdiction.
- Officer recruitment and retention.
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons.
- Violence Against Women Act implementation.
- Detention facilities.
- Public safety infrastructure.

Federal leadership reported that Interior has established communication channels with DHS, ICE, and major metropolitan law enforcement agencies to improve understanding of Tribal jurisdiction and Tribal identification.

Leadership also emphasized that improving public safety is essential for successful economic development and remains a priority for the Department.

Tribal Energy Resource Agreements

The Department expects to complete the first Tribal Energy Resource Agreement under TERA and is exploring a phased approach ("TERA Lite") that would allow Tribes to build administrative capacity before assuming full authority.

Officials suggested using Self-Governance agreements as a pathway toward eventual TERA eligibility.

Probate Modernization

Leadership identified probate modernization as another priority, noting the substantial backlog of unresolved cases.

Current initiatives include:

- Modernizing IT systems.
- Improving access to vital records.

- Expanding partnerships with Tribal enrollment offices.
- Sharing best practices from Tribes successfully administering probate.
- Developing conference sessions highlighting successful Tribal probate programs.

Inherent Federal Functions

A discussion centered on "inherent federal functions." Department leadership indicated that they believe many longstanding barriers to Self-Governance are based more on institutional interpretation than statutory limitations.

Rather than pursuing major legislative or regulatory changes, leadership emphasized:

- Reevaluating how agencies interpret existing authorities.
- Reducing unnecessary federal oversight.
- Allowing Tribes greater responsibility wherever legally permissible.

Committee members strongly supported this approach, noting that many remaining barriers result from institutional culture rather than legal requirements.

OSG Leadership Changes

Jason Bruno discussed his transition into the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Management role and confirmed that Matt Kallappa was serving as Acting Director of the Office of Self-Governance.

Budget Update for FY 2026 and FY 2027

Randi Adams and Sharon Omps

The Office of Budget, Performance and Management provided an overview of the FY 2026 enacted budget and early planning for FY 2027 and FY 2028.

Highlights included:

- Indian Affairs funding generally maintained at FY 2024 enacted levels.
- Public Safety received modest increases.
- Missing and Murdered Indigenous Persons funding increased.
- Additional funding provided for criminal investigations, Indian Police Academy, and McGirt implementation.
- Contract Support Costs and Section 105(l) leases remain mandatory obligations but continue creating budget pressures because they rely upon indefinite appropriations.

The presentation also reviewed the Tribal Priority Allocation ranking process used to inform future budget requests and encouraged greater Tribal participation in ranking budget priorities.

Committee members emphasized:

- Chronic delays in CSC and Section 105(l) payments create serious cash-flow problems for Tribal governments.
- Base Tribal funding remains inadequate.

Day One Adjournment

The SGAC recessed for the day after completing agenda items and discussions with Indian Affairs leadership.

DAY TWO – THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026

The SGAC reconvened at approximately 9:00 a.m.

BIA Update

Bryan Mercier, Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs

BIA Director Bryan Mercier provided an extensive operational update regarding:

- Probate modernization;
- Workforce and staffing issues;
- Wildland fire initiatives;
- 477 implementation;
- Trust responsibilities;
- Hiring plans;
- Technology modernization; and
- Operational priorities within BIA.

Probate Modernization Initiative

Director Mercier identified probate reform as a top departmental priority and discussed efforts to reduce the significant probate backlog.

Key points included:

- Approximately 50,000 probate cases remained pending nationally;
- The estimated value of pending probate assets exceeded \$700 million;
- Some families have waited nearly a decade for probate completion;
- Probate processing was being elevated as a national operational priority; and
- BIA leadership had incorporated probate metrics into performance plans for managers and supervisors.

Director Mercier outlined three primary components of the probate modernization strategy:

1. Changing BIA operational culture to prioritize probate processing;

2. Implementing technology solutions to automate workflow and improve efficiency; and
3. Improving access to vital records through partnerships and data-sharing initiatives.

Technology Modernization

BIA discussed the implementation of workflow automation tools intended to:

- Digitize probate workflow;
- Reduce paper-based processing;
- Improve accuracy;
- Streamline preparation of probate packages;
- Improve communication with the Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA); and
- Reduce delays caused by incomplete submissions.

Director Mercier clarified that the modernization effort focused primarily on workflow automation, not large-scale artificial intelligence analysis of personal data.

Committee members asked questions regarding:

- Data privacy protections;
- Training needs for Tribal probate staff;
- Technology implementation timelines;
- Integration with Tribal systems; and
- Whether Tribal courts could play a greater role in probate processing.

Tribal Probate Concerns

Tribal representatives discussed challenges experienced by Tribes already compacting probate functions, including:

- Limited staffing;
- Insufficient funding;
- Training needs;
- Outdated systems;
- Heavy administrative workload; and
- Delays in obtaining required documentation.

Participants requested additional technical support, training opportunities, and improved coordination between BIA and Tribal probate offices.

Staffing and Workforce Discussion

Committee members engaged in extensive discussion regarding federal staffing reductions and operational impacts.

Topics included:

- Deferred resignation programs;
- Federal hiring limitations;
- Loss of experienced employees;
- Trust responsibility concerns;
- Staffing shortages in realty and trust functions;
- OJS staffing;
- Workforce retention; and
- Maintaining continuity of services.

Chairman Allen emphasized that Tribal leaders remained concerned regarding whether Indian Affairs could continue meeting trust obligations under reduced staffing levels.

Director Mercier stated that BIA had lost approximately 400 employees through deferred resignation and retirement programs, rather than "thousands," and noted that leadership was seeking exemptions to hire critical positions.

Participants discussed:

- Hiring restrictions allow only one hire for every four vacancies;
- Efforts to secure exemptions for critical positions;
- Prioritization of probate, irrigation, power, and public safety positions; and
- The need to preserve institutional knowledge within Indian Affairs.

477 Programs

BIA announced a policy shift whereby the Department will generally defer to the recommendations of participating federal agencies regarding whether programs may be included within a Tribe's 477 plan.

Under the revised approach:

- Agencies funding the program will have greater influence over inclusion decisions.
- BIA will continue attempting to mediate disputes.
- The Department will no longer routinely exercise its authority to override another agency's objection.

BIA also explained that future decisions would place greater emphasis on maintaining a clear relationship between included programs and workforce development.

This announcement generated discussion. Committee members expressed concern that:

- The policy reduces Tribal flexibility.
- It appears inconsistent with Self-Governance principles.

- Tribes could lose long-standing integrated programs upon renewal.
- The shift creates uncertainty for existing 477 plans.

Several members noted that integrated approaches are precisely what make 477 successful and warned that the new interpretation could reverse decades of progress.

BIA clarified that:

- Existing approved programs would generally continue unless funding agencies withdraw support.
- Head Start had recently been approved for continued inclusion following successful interagency discussions.
- A list of disputed programs would be shared with Tribes to help future planning efforts.

Office of Self-Governance Update

Matt Kallappa, Acting Director, Office of Self-Governance

OSG provided updates regarding staffing, funding, negotiations, contract support costs, and operational improvements.

Staffing

OSG reported:

- Appointment of a new compact negotiator.
- Temporary administrative staffing support.
- Continued vacancies affecting negotiations and financial processing.

Leadership noted that staffing limitations continue affecting response times and processing speed.

Funding Status

OSG reviewed the status of:

- Tribal Priority Allocation funding
- Welfare Assistance
- Law Enforcement
- Adult Corrections
- Contract Support Costs

Funding continues to move forward despite delays associated with shutdown-related processing and Treasury warrant issuance.

Contract Support Costs

OSG expects initial FY 2026 CSC payments to be distributed shortly.

Staff encouraged Tribes to continue submitting updated indirect cost information and reminded participants that incomplete submissions delay payments.

FASSAR Reports

OSG emphasized the importance of timely FASSAR reporting. Late reports delay funding distributions for all participating Tribes.

New Self-Governance Participants

OSG announced several new Tribal participants entering Self-Governance for FY 2027 and noted continuing interest from additional Tribes considering participation.

Administrative Improvements

OSG highlighted several modernization efforts, including:

- Updated model funding agreements.
- Standardized email portals for requests.
- Improved technical committee collaboration.
- Continued work to improve funding transparency within ASAP.

Committee members strongly supported continued work to improve transparency and reduce manual financial processing.

BIE Update

Bureau of Indian Education Leadership

BIE discussed the planned transfer of several education programs from the Department of Education under an Interagency Agreement.

Programs include:

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act programs.
- Title VI.
- Career and Technical Education.
- Vocational Rehabilitation.

Leadership emphasized that:

- Current services should continue uninterrupted.
- Department of Education retains statutory authority.
- Additional consultation remains ongoing before implementation.

Johnson-O'Malley Modernization

BIE reviewed implementation of the Johnson-O'Malley Modernization Act.

Key points included:

- Funding now follows actual student counts.
- Student participation has increased substantially.
- Funding has remained essentially flat despite higher participation.

Committee members discussed the need for increased appropriations to reflect actual student populations.

School Facilities

BIE reported progress toward assuming greater responsibility for facilities maintenance and highlighted continued expansion of Section 105(l) opportunities for Tribal schools.

Leadership acknowledged:

- Significant deferred maintenance.
- Continued need for school replacements.
- Importance of improving school safety.

Section 105(l) Guidance and Backlogs

Cody Seaton, Office of Tribal Leases

Program leadership reported:

- Nearly \$70 million in leases processed.
- Approximately 2,800 pending leases.
- Development of a new online lease management portal that will allow Tribes to:
 - Track lease status.
 - Upload documents.
 - Monitor payments.
 - Increase transparency.

Committee members expressed continuing frustration regarding delays in receiving lease payments.

Discussion focused heavily on:

- Treasury fund sweeps.
- Supplemental appropriations.
- Financial obligations versus executed leases.
- Funding movement between Interior, Treasury, OMB, and OSG.

Office of Justice Services (OJS) Discussion

Charles Addington and Kevin Martin

OJS reported positive funding news, including modest increases for:

- Public Safety
- Missing and Murdered Unit
- Indian Police Academy
- Tribal Courts

Recruitment and Retention

OJS identified continued workforce shortages caused by:

- Housing shortages.
- Retirement disparities.
- Lower salaries.
- Lengthy background investigations.

Several initiatives were highlighted, including:

- Expanded recruitment efforts.
- College outreach.
- Veteran recruitment.
- Housing strategies.
- Legislative efforts supporting Tribal law enforcement retirement parity.

Committee members strongly emphasized that Tribal officers continue leaving for higher-paying state and local agencies.

Missing and Murdered Unit

OJS described plans to refocus the Missing and Murdered Unit by:

- Increasing Tribal participation.
- Funding Tribal investigators.
- Expanding evidence technician support.
- Developing regional resource manuals.
- Enhancing investigative technology.

Examples were shared of successful cold-case investigations and large-scale operations involving narcotics and human trafficking.

Drug Enforcement

OJS highlighted successful regional enforcement operations involving:

- Methamphetamine seizures.
- Fentanyl seizures.
- Human trafficking investigations.
- Firearms recoveries.
- Large cash seizures.

Leadership encouraged Tribes to request assistance for future operations.

Tribal Self-Governance Consortium Update

Jay Spaan, Executive Director

Jay Spaan provided updates regarding:

- Tribal Self-Governance education initiatives;
- Technical assistance efforts;
- Upcoming conferences and trainings;
- Policy coordination; and
- Ongoing support for Self-Governance Tribes.

Tribal Energy Resource Agreements (TERA)

Johnna Blackhair

The committee discussed ongoing work related to Tribal Energy Resource Agreements (TERA), including:

- Regulatory coordination;
- Energy development opportunities;
- Self-Governance authorities;
- Operational implementation issues; and
- Opportunities to improve Tribal energy development processes.

Continued Dialogue with Indian Affairs Leadership

The committee reconvened with Indian Affairs leadership for additional discussion regarding:

- Staffing;
- Budget pressures;
- Operational continuity;
- Self-Governance implementation;
- Trust responsibilities; and
- Tribal-federal coordination.

Committee members reiterate the importance of:

- Maintaining trust obligations;
- Improving communication;
- Preserving Tribal consultation;
- Reducing delays in trust services; and
- Ensuring that operational restructuring efforts do not negatively affect Tribal services.

Adjournment: The February 25–26, 2026, Department of the Interior Self-Governance Advisory Committee meeting adjourned at approximately 5:00 p.m.