



COALITION OF LARGE TRIBES

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Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation of Oregon • Crow Creek Sioux Tribe • Crow Nation
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**RESPONSES OF OJ SEMANS, SR.
TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD**

House Committee on Natural Resources

Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations and Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs

Oversight Hearing: “Innovative Technologies and Initiatives to Tackle the MMIP Crisis in

Indian Country”

July 14, 2026

These responses supplement the written and oral testimony of OJ Semans, Sr., Executive Director of COLT, and are intended to provide formal responses to the Questions for the Record transmitted by Congressman Paul Gosar, D.D.S.

Question 1. Have you observed any impact on the MMIP crisis from the recent increase of tribal casinos and gaming revenue?

The Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT) has not observed that tribal gaming revenue, standing alone, is a cause of the MMIP crisis. Where successful gaming enterprises exist, those revenues may support public safety personnel, surveillance systems, victim services, emergency communications, and other local governmental capacity. But gaming revenue is uneven across Indian Country and does not alter the United States’ trust and treaty responsibilities to support public safety on tribal homelands. For many COLT member tribes, particularly large land-base tribes, the principal public safety challenges are geography, delayed response times, jurisdictional fragmentation, drug trafficking, shortages of trained officers and investigators, lack of forensic support, and inconsistent coordination among federal, tribal, state, county, and municipal agencies. When tribes are fortunate enough to have significant gaming revenue, like COLT Board member the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, they often direct those resources toward public safety, and in Creek Nation’s case, quintupling their law enforcement force in the last six years.

To the extent casinos or other public venues create increased traffic, transient populations, or heightened nighttime activity, those issues can be managed if tribal governments have the same core tools available to other governments: trained police, interoperable communications, camera and digital-evidence protocols, victim-services capacity, emergency alert authority, and standing agreements with DOJ, FBI, BIA-OJS, U.S. Attorneys, and local partners. The solution is not to view tribal economic development as a risk factor, but to ensure tribal governments have the public safety capacity and legal authority necessary to protect their citizens and visitors.



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Question 2. In February, human remains were found in mass graves near Akron Stadium in Mexico. But this is not new; it has been an ongoing crisis for years. Have you examined any mass graves in Mexico for tribal remains? Has Mexico contacted you for assistance identifying remains in these mass graves?

No. I have not personally examined mass graves in Mexico for tribal remains, and COLT is not a forensic identification agency. To my knowledge, Mexican authorities have not contacted me or COLT for assistance identifying remains from those sites.

The broader question is nevertheless important. Families in Indian Country often face years of uncertainty because of delayed investigations, delayed DNA testing, inaccurate or incomplete data entry, and poor interagency coordination. If there is any reasonable possibility that remains recovered outside the United States may include American Indian or Alaska Native persons, the United States should have a formal protocol for federal, tribal, and family coordination. That protocol should include DOJ, FBI, BIA-OJS, the Department of State, DHS where appropriate, NamUs, tribal governments, and family liaisons. It should also include culturally appropriate notification and handling of remains, tribal data sovereignty protections, and expedited forensic comparison where families have provided DNA samples or missing-person reports.

Question 3. Over the past decade, the other side of the aisle has defunded, or called to defund, law enforcement. Does defunding local, state, tribal, or federal law enforcement help or harm tribal communities?

Defunding law enforcement harms tribal communities. Indian Country already faces a severe public safety deficit. My testimony explained that BIA-OJS public safety and justice resources are far below identified need and that Indian Country requires substantial additional personnel to meet even minimum law enforcement staffing benchmarks. In practical terms, MMIP, homicide, sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking, child victimization, and narcotics cases require officers, investigators, dispatchers, forensic specialists, victim advocates, prosecutors, and family liaisons. When those positions are absent, the first 24 to 48 hours of an investigation are undermined.

The answer is not less law enforcement. The answer is better trained, better coordinated, culturally informed, accountable law enforcement working in partnership with tribal governments and families. COLT appreciates the Trump Administration's renewed focus on Indian Country public safety, including Secretarial Order 3450, which establishes an Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force, realigns BIA-OJS criminal investigations, refocuses missing-person and homicide case



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work, creates a Predatory Crimes Unit, directs increased deployment of Mobile Enforcement Teams and DOI Opioid Task Force operations, and emphasizes expanded training at the Indian Police Academy's Advanced Training Center.

Question 4. What are the first steps you would take to address the MMIP crisis? Who would you choose to lead the coalition, and which roles would you outline? Can you outline a preferred solution for the Committee?

The first step is to establish a standing federal-tribal operational coalition, not another short-term initiative. COLT recommends a joint DOI-DOJ structure with tribal governments as full governmental partners. DOI, through BIA-OJS and implementation of Secretarial Order 3450, should lead Indian Country deployment and task-force coordination. DOJ should ensure that FBI, U.S. Attorneys' Offices, the Office of Tribal Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, Bureau of Justice Assistance, and Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention are aligned operationally. Tribal governments and tribal police must co-lead on the ground because they know the communities, geography, families, and risks.

The roles should be clear. Tribal governments and tribal police should lead community response, family communication, local intelligence, search coordination, and culturally appropriate protocols. BIA-OJS should coordinate Indian Country law enforcement deployment, Mobile Enforcement Teams, opioid task force support, Indian Police Academy training, and BIA-OJS investigative alignment. FBI should provide major-crime investigative support, forensic resources, digital evidence capacity, DNA testing coordination, and federal investigative personnel. U.S. Attorneys should engage early in cases to assist with warrants, charging strategy, and declination transparency. DOJ victim-service programs should provide family liaisons, victim advocates, and witness support. FEMA, FCC, and state AMBER coordinators should support tribal alerting authority, IPAWS enrollment, AMBER/MEP implementation, WEA/EAS capability, and exercises.

COLT's preferred immediate solution is a Great Plains MMIP and Violent Crime Task Force Pilot based in or near Rapid City, South Dakota, serving Rosebud, Cheyenne River, Standing Rock, Crow Creek, Northern Cheyenne, Pine Ridge, and other Great Plains communities. The pilot should include a lead U.S. Attorney's Office, dedicated FBI coordination, BIA-OJS participation, tribal police leadership, tribal prosecutors, victim-service providers, family liaisons, and state and local partners. It should use first-48-hour investigative protocols, cold-case and active-case



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reviews, rapid DNA and digital-evidence escalation, AMBER/MEP integration, tribal alerting authority support, after-action reviews, and public metrics.

And any real fix must include recognition of tribes' authority over non-Indians as territorial sovereigns, as set forth in COLT's jurisdiction fix attached to my testimony and set forth in [COLT Resolution: 08-16-2022-Resolution #03-2022 \(NN-Twin Arrows\)](#), [Resolution in Support of the Intertribal Legislative Proposal for Addressing Non-Indian Crime in Indian Country](#).

Question 5. In addition to lidar detection and DNA identification, are there any other emerging technologies that may address MMIP reporting, response, and recovery?

Yes. Lidar and DNA analysis are useful, but MMIP response requires a broader technology ecosystem tied to trained investigators and tribal authority. Useful tools include integrated AMBER and Missing and Endangered Persons (MEP) Alerts; FEMA IPAWS-enabled tribal alerting authority; drones and aerial search tools; GIS mapping and geospatial dashboards; digital evidence systems for cell phone data, social media leads, surveillance video, license-plate reader data, and public tips; NCIC and NamUs integration; rapid forensic triage; satellite and resilient communications; evidence tracking and chain-of-custody tools; and carefully governed AI-assisted cold-case review.

The most important point is that technology cannot substitute for personnel, protocols, and authority. A drone cannot interview a witness. A database cannot comfort a family. An alert system does not matter if a tribe lacks alerting authority or if the case is not entered promptly and accurately. Any technology initiative should therefore be tied to operational protocols, tribal data sovereignty, family communication, BIA-OJS and FBI coordination, and trained tribal law enforcement.

Question 6. Are there cultural practices or traditions that improve or complicate federal MMIP reporting, response, and recovery?

Yes. Tribal cultural practices and traditions can greatly improve MMIP response when federal agencies respect and work with them. Tribal communities have strong kinship networks, extended family systems, elders, spiritual leaders, community search traditions, and deep knowledge of local geography. Families and community members often know where a person was last seen, who they were with, which roads or homes matter, and which places should be searched first. That knowledge should be treated as operational intelligence.



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Cultural practices can complicate federal response only when investigators lack training or fail to communicate respectfully. Mourning practices, ceremonies, language issues, fear of retaliation, distrust caused by historical trauma, and protocols regarding remains or sacred places may affect when and how families speak with investigators. That does not mean families are uncooperative. It means investigators need tribal liaisons, cultural orientation, family communication protocols, and patience. These should be part of BIA-OJS, FBI, DOJ, U.S. Attorney, and tribal police training.

Question 7. Are there cultural practices or traditions that the federal government has misunderstood that affect MMIP reporting, response, and recovery?

Yes. Federal agencies have too often misunderstood tribal sovereignty, kinship systems, family communication, the cultural significance of remains, and tribal data sovereignty. Tribal governments should not be treated merely as stakeholders. They are sovereign governments whose citizens are affected and whose police officers, courts, leaders, and families must be operational partners from the beginning of an investigation.

Federal agencies also sometimes treat families only as sources of information rather than as victims entitled to communication, dignity, updates, and support. Families should have designated liaisons, regular updates, and a clear explanation of which agency is responsible for each part of an investigation. Federal systems must also respect language, ceremony, kinship obligations, and cultural protocols involving remains, burial sites, sacred places, and personal effects. Finally, MMIP data is not simply a federal dataset. It concerns tribal citizens, families, children, victims, and sensitive cultural information. Tribes must have a meaningful role in how that data is collected, shared, protected, and used.

Question 8. Are there any proactive steps, including education, digital campaigns, Amber alerts, or other tools, to warn vulnerable populations and improve response?

Yes. COLT recommends a layered prevention and response strategy. First, Congress should support integrated AMBER and MEP Alert training. MEP Alerts should allow rapid public notification when a missing or endangered person does not yet meet AMBER criteria, while AMBER should remain the specialized child-abduction alert. The systems should be coordinated so investigators can move from MEP to AMBER as facts develop, without losing critical time.



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Second, Congress should support a Tribal Alerting Authority Initiative so more tribal governments can become FEMA-certified Alerting Authorities, enroll in IPAWS, issue Wireless Emergency Alerts and Emergency Alert System messages, develop dispatch procedures, coordinate with state AMBER coordinators, and conduct exercises. Third, tribes need public education campaigns tailored to local communities, including radio public service announcements, social media campaigns, school programs, tribal-language materials, elder safety outreach, youth digital safety education, trafficking-awareness materials, and community training on how to report missing persons quickly.

Fourth, Congress should support practical tools: missing-person intake forms, family contact cards, emergency checklists, victim advocate contacts, tribal broadcaster protocols, school resource officer coordination, and annual missing-person alert exercises. These tools should be connected to the training model COLT piloted in 2023, including first-responder priorities, evidence preservation, witness identification, homicide scene management, cold-case review, report writing, and courtroom-ready documentation.

Question 9. Is there anything that the hearing did not address regarding the MMIP crisis that you would like to address?

Yes. The hearing appropriately focused on technology and innovation, but technology alone cannot solve MMIP. It must be connected to law enforcement capacity, DOJ collaboration, BIA-OJS implementation, FBI investigative support, U.S. Attorney engagement, tribal police authority, victim services, family communication, AMBER/MEP alerting, forensic resources, and tribal jurisdiction.

The first issue Congress should keep before it is jurisdiction. COLT's testimony attached COLT's jurisdiction proposal, which would close gaps that leave non-Indian offenders beyond direct tribal accountability. Tribal governments are closest to victims, crime scenes, witnesses, and community conditions. They must have authority to protect their people, subject to due process protections.

The second issue is outcome accountability. Congress should require DOJ and DOI to report measurable results for MMIP programs, violent-crime surges, task forces, and Secretarial Order 3450 implementation. Metrics should include response times, arrests, prosecutions, case clearances, DNA testing timelines, family communication, AMBER/MEP activations, tribal participation, and whether tribal capacity remains after federal deployments end.



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The third issue is training. COLT’s 2023 MMIW/P training provides a practical model that can be scaled immediately. BIA-OJS, FBI, DOJ, U.S. Attorneys, tribal police, dispatchers, victim advocates, and family liaisons should train together on first-48-hour protocols, evidence preservation, interviews, report writing, crime scene management, cold-case review, and courtroom-ready documentation.

Finally, the Committee should ensure that Secretarial Order 3450 is implemented with tribal governments as full partners. The Order’s focus on an Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force, BIA-OJS coordination, investigative realignment, a Predatory Crimes Unit, Mobile Enforcement Teams, opioid task force operations, and expanded training creates an important framework. Success will depend on whether the federal government works directly with tribes, measures outcomes, and builds permanent public safety capacity.

The human consequences of the United States’ failures are visible across Indian Country. Victims and their families and achieving justice should be everyone’s focus.

Navajo elder **Ella Mae Begay**, a respected weaver and grandmother of nine, disappeared from her home on the Navajo Nation in June 2021 and has never been found. Her family continues to seek answers and accountability years after her disappearance, and her case has become emblematic of the MMIP crisis affecting Native families throughout the United States. Just yesterday, the man who confessed to violent beating her and leaving her in the desert after stealing her truck, and who was released after no effort by the Arizona U.S. Attorney’s office to prosecute him when his confession was suppressed, committed more acts of violence. See [Navajo elder Ella Mae Begay's last known contact faces burglary charges | AP News](#).

On the Rosebud Reservation, **Savannah Standing Bear** disappeared in March 2025 and remains missing. The Bureau of Indian Affairs Missing and Murdered Unit and Rosebud Tribal Police continue to seek information regarding her whereabouts. Her family continues to live with uncertainty while the investigation remains open. It should be noted that this investigation is a joint operation with the Rosebud Sioux Tribal Police, Investigative Unit, FBI, BIA MMU and the South Dakota Civil Air Patrol. Together they did grid searches, the Civil Air Patrol used a drone to search the wooded area and used color detection to identify places of interest. Because of recruitment difficulties the investigator was pulled off the investigation and placed on patrol to try to use Police presence as a deterrent. It is imperative that proper and equal funding be identified and passing legislation such as the Bridging Agency Data Gaps & Ensuring Safety (BADGES) for Native Communities Act.



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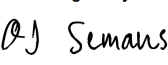
In June 2026, **Tylen Valandra** was killed in a shooting on the Rosebud Reservation, prompting the Rosebud Sioux Tribe to offer a reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible. The case demonstrates the continuing need for investigative resources and community safety partnerships. When resources are so scarce that investigators are pulled away to patrol—as my son who is an investigative officer routinely experiencing—answers cannot be found.

Also in June 2026, ten-year-old **Steven Lopez** was shot in the head while inside his family's home on the Pine Ridge Reservation. His family publicly questioned the lack of public alerts and information surrounding the incident while focusing on his long-term recovery. Their experience illustrates why timely communication, public notification systems, and coordinated law enforcement responses matter.

Similarly, on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, **Thomas Rockroads III** died after suffering injuries from a violent attack. He had lived with significant disabilities resulting from a prior traumatic brain injury and was particularly vulnerable. His family subsequently called for systemic reforms, greater accountability, and more effective public safety responses. Thomas was beaten with a shovel and the responding BIA-OJS officer did not even get out of her truck or file a report.

These individuals were not statistics. They were parents, children, grandparents, siblings, relatives, and citizens of tribal nations. Their stories underscore why Congress must focus not only on technology, but on building a public safety system capable of preventing violence, responding rapidly when it occurs, supporting victims and families, and ensuring accountability for offenders.

Respectfully submitted,

DocuSigned by:

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Suggested bibliography:



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