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**RESPONSES OF OJ SEMANS, SR.
TO QUESTIONS FOR THE RECORD**

*Questions from Chairman Bruce Westerman
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 the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), and are intended to provide formal responses to Questions for the Record submitted by Chairman Bruce Westerman. These responses track my responses to Congressman Gosar’s Questions for the Record and emphasize practical public safety solutions, technology, first-response protocols, interagency coordination, and tribal sovereignty.

Question 1. Your written testimony discussed COLT’s MMIP cold-case training in Billings, Montana. Could you explain the curriculum utilized in that training? How can the skills learned through these trainings best be implemented during the first 48 hours of an MMIP case?

COLT’s 2023 Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Persons (MMIW/P) Cold Case Training in Billings, Montana was developed as a practical, investigator-focused training designed to improve outcomes in both active and cold cases. The training brought together tribal law enforcement officers, federal investigators, prosecutors, forensic specialists, victim advocates, and nationally recognized cold-case experts to focus on investigative techniques that directly affect whether a case can be solved.

The curriculum included crime-scene management, evidence preservation, witness development, interview techniques, homicide investigation fundamentals, digital evidence collection, intelligence gathering, cold-case review methodologies, report writing, prosecutorial coordination, and courtroom-ready documentation. Particular emphasis was placed on identifying investigative failures during the first hours and days of a case and understanding how those failures can permanently undermine justice for victims and families.



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The most important lesson from the training is that the first 48 hours usually determine the trajectory of an MMIP investigation. During that period, agencies should immediately establish investigative leadership, preserve physical and electronic evidence, secure surveillance footage, identify witnesses, coordinate searches, enter information into appropriate databases, and ensure continual communication with family members. Investigative delay can never be fully recovered later, regardless of how much technology becomes available afterward.

Congress can help by supporting regional tribal training programs that allow tribal police, BIA-OJS personnel, FBI agents, prosecutors, dispatchers, victim advocates, and family liaisons to train together using common protocols. Indian Country benefits most when agencies respond as a coordinated team rather than as separate jurisdictions.

Question 2. In your written testimony, you described a July 2025 meeting between FBI Director Kash Patel and COLT executives during which tribal leaders discussed emerging technologies, including DNA testing capabilities. How can AI and other technologies be used effectively while honoring tribal consultation and tribal sovereignty?

COLT specifically thanks FBI Director Kash Patel for meeting with COLT executives in July 2025 and for demonstrating a willingness to engage directly with tribal leaders on practical public-safety solutions. During that meeting, tribal leaders pressed for stronger federal action on MMIP, including improved data-sharing protocols, expanded FBI and law-enforcement presence in Indian Country, increased DNA-testing capacity, and greater support for unresolved violent-crime investigations. COLT also expressed support for the Administration's Operation Not Forgotten deployments while emphasizing that these efforts should evolve into a permanent federal-tribal operational framework that includes named federal points of contact, written escalation procedures, rapid forensic assistance, digital-evidence support, and formal mechanisms through which tribes and families can elevate stalled MMIP and violent-crime cases. The meeting demonstrated that meaningful consultation produces actionable solutions when tribal governments participate as full sovereign partners rather than stakeholders.

The July 2025 meeting reinforced an important principle: tribes must be partners in the development and deployment of technologies used in Indian Country. Technology works best when it supports tribal public safety priorities while respecting tribal sovereignty, tribal data governance, family privacy, and community priorities.



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Artificial intelligence has significant potential to assist MMIP and violent-crime investigations. AI-assisted systems may help review cold-case files, organize investigative records, identify patterns across large data sets, support geospatial analysis, and help investigators manage significant amounts of digital evidence. These tools may improve efficiency and help identify leads that otherwise might remain undiscovered.

At the same time, AI cannot replace professional judgment, community knowledge, family communication, or tribal decision-making. Tribes should be consulted whenever federal agencies implement technologies involving tribal citizens, tribal investigations, or tribal lands. Governments should establish safeguards addressing privacy, transparency, auditing, data ownership, tribal access to information, and how AI-generated leads are documented and verified.

The goal should be to use technology to strengthen investigators and public safety professionals, not to replace them. Technology succeeds when it is combined with trained personnel, clear protocols, tribal participation, and accountability.

Question 3. Large land-base tribes face unique challenges because of geography and distance. How can technologies such as drones assist investigations involving missing persons and violent crime?

Large land-base tribes govern some of the most remote and geographically challenging areas in the United States. Many COLT member tribes are responsible for thousands of square miles of reservation lands that include forests, deserts, badlands, mountains, river systems, shelter belts, open grasslands, and extensive road networks. Responding quickly to emergencies in these environments often requires significant travel time, personnel resources, and communications capacity.

Drones provide tribal law enforcement with a practical force multiplier that can dramatically increase situational awareness and search capabilities. Modern unmanned aircraft systems can rapidly survey large areas that would otherwise require dozens of ground personnel and many hours to search. Equipped with high-resolution cameras, thermal imaging systems, infrared sensors, and geospatial mapping tools, drones can assist investigators in locating missing persons, identifying evidence, documenting crime scenes, monitoring search grids, and assessing difficult terrain before personnel enter an area.



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For MMIP investigations, drones are particularly valuable during the first 48 hours after a disappearance. Drones can be deployed within minutes to search river corridors, wooded areas, ravines, abandoned structures, stock ponds, remote roads, outbuildings, and other locations where a missing person may be located. Thermal imaging can be especially useful during nighttime operations or in remote areas where visibility is limited. In large-scale searches, drones allow commanders to coordinate volunteer search teams more efficiently while reducing duplicative efforts and improving officer safety.

Drones also improve evidence preservation and prosecution. Aerial imagery can create detailed geospatial records of search areas and crime scenes, document vehicle tracks, identify disturbance patterns, preserve a record of environmental conditions, and generate courtroom-quality visual evidence. When integrated with GIS mapping platforms, investigators can create searchable records of previous search efforts, identify coverage gaps, and develop more efficient deployment strategies.

In addition, drones can support emergency responses involving violent crime. Drones may help officers assess dangerous situations before entering an area, locate suspects who have fled into difficult terrain, monitor large public events, or identify evidence that may not be visible from the ground. In communities where a handful of officers may be responsible for hundreds or thousands of square miles, drones can substantially extend the reach of tribal law enforcement.

Congress should consider establishing dedicated Indian Country drone programs that include equipment acquisition, training, certification, maintenance funding, data-management protocols, and regional deployment capabilities. Technology is most effective when placed in the hands of trained tribal personnel who understand the landscape, community, and operational needs of the investigation.

Question 4. What technologies are most useful during the first 48 hours after an American Indian or Alaska Native person is reported missing or is the victim of a violent crime?

The most effective technologies during the first 48 hours are those that improve communication, accelerate evidence collection, facilitate searches, and support rapid public notification. These include FEMA's Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS); Wireless Emergency Alerts (WEA); AMBER Alerts and Missing and Endangered Person (MEP) Alerts; drones and aerial search platforms; GIS-based search and mapping systems; real-time information-sharing platforms; NCIC and NamUs integration; cell-phone and digital-evidence analysis tools; satellite



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and resilient communications systems; rapid forensic triage and DNA processing capabilities; and secure evidence management systems.

These technologies should be incorporated into a standardized first-48-hours protocol. The protocol should explain who initiates each tool, who approves public alerts, who enters information into databases, who coordinates with state AMBER coordinators, who communicates with families, and who is responsible for preserving evidence. Without clear responsibility, even the best technology can fail at the moment it is most needed.

Technology alone is not enough. Alert systems are ineffective if information is not promptly entered, databases are ineffective if agencies fail to coordinate, and technology cannot substitute for trained officers and investigators. Success depends on personnel, protocols, leadership, training, and communication.

Question 5. What emerging technology do you believe holds the greatest promise for addressing the MMIP crisis?

No single technology will solve MMIP. If I were to identify the area with the greatest long-term potential, it would be integrated investigative-information and data-sharing systems that connect tribal, federal, state, and local agencies while respecting tribal sovereignty and tribal data governance.

Far too often, investigations suffer because information exists in separate systems that do not communicate effectively. Future investments should focus on secure platforms that allow investigators to share information, coordinate searches, track leads, manage evidence, document family communications, and protect sensitive tribal information.

AI-assisted investigative review tools also show promise, particularly for cold-case analysis, large multi-jurisdictional investigations, and image review. When appropriately governed, these tools can help investigators identify patterns and relationships that are difficult to detect through manual review alone. AI tools should support investigators by highlighting possible leads, not making conclusions.

One particularly promising area is the integration of drones, geospatial mapping platforms, and AI-assisted imaging technologies. Modern imaging systems can process thousands of photographs collected during aerial searches and rapidly identify anomalies that warrant human review. For example, AI tools can help locate disturbed ground, abandoned vehicles, articles of clothing,



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campsites, trail patterns, unauthorized excavation sites, burn areas, or other features that may be difficult for investigators to identify through manual review of hundreds or thousands of images.

AI-assisted imaging may also help investigators compare aerial imagery across time periods to identify changes in terrain, detect newly disturbed locations, monitor remote areas, and prioritize search locations. On large reservations where search areas may encompass hundreds or thousands of square miles, these tools can significantly reduce the time required to analyze imagery and allocate scarce personnel resources more effectively. Instead of requiring investigators to manually review every image collected by a drone or aircraft, AI systems can identify locations that should receive immediate attention from search teams.

AI-assisted imaging also has potential value in cold-case investigations. Historic aerial photographs, satellite imagery, search records, and geospatial data can be analyzed together to identify search gaps, recurring locations of interest, travel corridors, and patterns that were not apparent when information was originally collected. In some cases, the technology may help investigators revisit old cases using information that already exists but has never been systematically analyzed.

Beyond search operations, AI-enhanced image analysis can assist with crime-scene documentation and evidence preservation. Three-dimensional modeling, digital reconstruction, automated mapping, and image-enhancement technologies allow investigators to create detailed visual records that improve coordination among responding agencies and strengthen courtroom presentations. These capabilities are especially valuable in Indian Country, where investigators often work across vast distances and multiple jurisdictions.

At the same time, AI should never be viewed as a substitute for trained investigators, community knowledge, family engagement, or professional judgment. AI systems identify possibilities, not conclusions. Any potential lead generated through AI analysis must be verified through traditional investigative work. The greatest promise of AI-assisted imaging is not that it replaces people, but that it allows limited tribal, federal, and local law-enforcement personnel to focus their attention more quickly on the locations and evidence most likely to produce results.

Congress should consider supporting pilot programs that provide tribal law-enforcement agencies with access to drones, GIS platforms, AI-assisted imagery analysis software, training, technical support, and tribal data-governance protections. Large land-base tribes often face the same geographic challenges as federal public-land agencies, but with far fewer personnel and resources.



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AI-assisted imaging offers an opportunity to help bridge that gap while keeping decision-making authority firmly in the hands of tribal governments and trained investigators.

Ultimately, however, the most important investment remains people. Technology should support tribal police officers, investigators, prosecutors, victim advocates, dispatchers, and families. The United States cannot technologically innovate its way around chronic understaffing and underfunding of public safety in Indian Country. Lasting success requires both modern tools and sustained investment in tribal public safety capacity.

Respectfully submitted,

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