

**Statement of  
William “Billy” Kirkland  
Nominee for the Position of  
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs  
at the  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Before the Committee on Indian Affairs  
United States Senate**

**July 16, 2025**

Thank you, Chairwoman Murkowski, Vice Chairman Schatz, and members of the Committee. I would also like to take a moment to thank your staff for their time and effort. I know the long hours they routinely put in to ensure the important work of this Committee is carried out effectively. I’ve greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with many of you and your teams over the past few weeks. It has been both an exciting and humbling experience.

I want to thank Congressman Brian Jack for his introduction—and more importantly, for his friendship. I also want to thank my mother, Gloria, and my father, Major Bill Kirkland, for being here today in support of my nomination. My brother and sister are also in attendance; growing up, they made sure I wasn’t the only Navajo in our school systems. And most importantly, I’d like to thank my wife, Paige, for being here with our three children—Will, Carter, and L.

It is an honor to be here today as President Donald Trump’s nominee to serve Indian Country as the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior.

It seems typical when a Native American addresses this distinguished Committee to begin with an introduction in their native language. Unfortunately, linguistics is not one of my strengths. My aunties gave up years ago on the idea of me mastering the Navajo language, though I know they still held hope that I could at least introduce myself properly and share my clans here with y’all today. The sad truth is that if I attempted to do so, I’d likely use up all the time allotted for this hearing. So instead, I’ll simply say: “Yá’át’ééh, y’all.” For those wondering, that’s Southern Navajo for “hello.”

My name is Billy Kirkland. I’m a proud member of the Navajo Nation, I am Bìjìh Bitoodnii. I was born just north of the Four Sacred Mountains. I am the son of a Diné mother and a father who served our nation in the U.S. Army for over 20 years. My mother’s story is one that was all too common in Indian Country. She was taken from her ancestral homeland and family, during a period that is now known as the “Termination Era.” She taught me strength and perseverance—traits that define Native communities, especially among the Navajo. My father, through his military career, taught me commitment and sacrifice.

Growing up, I was given unique perspectives and experiences due to my father’s career. I relocated over 15 times before graduating high school. From one coast to the other and even overseas. Starting over in new environments with different circumstances became second nature, but I learned no matter where in the world my father’s job took my family that I was Diné. My

mom taught me this. She taught me about Kit Carson and the Long Walk. About the heroic leadership of Manuelito and his prophetic foresight with this famous quote “My grandchildren, education is a ladder. Tell our people to take it.” She helped develop a deep respect for my heritage, that is passed down through my clan relationships. I spent many summer days in LeChee, chasing sheep and hauling water to my Grandma Susie’s sheep camp—because like on many reservations even today, water is scarce, and electricity was just a dream. It is where I learned first-hand the infrastructure struggles that are far too common still today in Indian Country. I developed an undeniable connection with the land and the people. But my family has also experienced the darker realities of reservation life—alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and lack of opportunity. I’ve seen firsthand the lack of economic opportunity in Indian Country. When the Navajo Generating Station shut down in northern AZ, it devastated jobs in an already struggling community. I know we can—and must—do better.

The Navajo believe in *Hózhó*—or balance. I believe there is a way to bring meaningful opportunities to Indian Country while still honoring and preserving our Native heritage and traditional ways. If confirmed, I understand that the mission of Indian Affairs at the Department of the Interior is to uphold meaningful government-to-government relationships with federally recognized tribes, Alaska Natives and ANCs; to enact policies that support self-determination and tribal sovereignty; and to steward trust assets while maintaining the federal trust responsibilities that aim to support the social, cultural, and economic self-sufficiency of tribal communities across Indian Country. And while the Office of Indian Affairs has no official oversight role, we will be advocates for our Native Hawaiian brothers and sisters. We will work to ensure that both the legal and moral obligations are carried out on their behalf.

If confirmed, I will work with this Committee to uphold the federal trust responsibility. I will work in partnership with Tribal Governments, Tribal Leaders, and ANCs to respond directly to the challenges their communities face. I believe they are best positioned to identify and implement the solutions their people need—better than any federal agency or bureaucrat in Washington, D.C.

During my time in the White House, I was proud to work closely with the Department of the Interior and the Office of Indian Affairs on a range of issues. Our administration was the first to formally recognize the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women. President Trump established “Operation Lady Justice” and later issued a proclamation, and later signed into law Senate Bill 227, *Savanna’s Act*, and Senate Bill 982, the *Not Invisible Act*.

I was privileged to be part of the first administration to recognize and honor Native Code Talkers in the Oval Office. We helped ensure that over 350 Opportunity Zones included Native American lands. We formalized the DOI Opioid Reduction Task Force within the Office of Justice Services and implemented the *Ashlynnne Mike AMBER Alert in Indian Country Act*. We worked to ensure Indian Country was fully included in the CARES Act, and we worked to streamline and overhaul permitting processes. These were meaningful accomplishments—but much work remains to be done.

My prior experience in the White House, in business, and in government relations has given me the unique tools to serve all Indian Country, Alaska Native, ANCs and Native Hawaiians. I know

that collaboration and meaningful consultation with tribal leaders must be a top priority in fulfilling the mission of the Office of Indian Affairs. I once heard a smart Hawaiian say, “you have to go slow to go fast.” If confirmed, I intend to spend my first 90 days listening to tribal leaders and the Congressional Committees of jurisdiction to understand top priorities and develop a clear action plan. I will work to build consensus and move quickly once met. I will lean on the Committees’ experience and expertise. I have reached out to and sought advice and counsel from past Assistant Secretary Tara Sweeney and Larry Echohawk and if confirmed I will rely on all Committee members and their input to most effectively fulfill the duties of the Office of Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

As this Committee knows, Indian Country is not a homogenous community, one size does not fit all. Each tribe is distinct—each with its own identity, history, and needs. My goal will be to meet those needs and further self-governance. If confirmed my goal will be to honor the diversity of Indian Country by ensuring our policies are responsive, respectful, and rooted in partnership and meet our trust responsibilities.