



*San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe
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**United States Senate
Committee on Indian Affairs
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 628, Washington, DC
Hearing on S. 4633
Northeast Arizona Indian Water Rights Settlement Act of 2024
Written Testimony of Johnny Lehi Jr., Vice President
San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe
Tuba City, Arizona
September 25, 2024, 2:30 PM ET**

Hello in Paiute

I want to thank Chairman Schatz and Ranking Member Murkowski for allowing us to come and testify today about Senate Bill 4633. I would also like to thank Senator Kelly and Senator Sinema for their unwavering support in moving this bill forward.

My name is Johnny Lehi Jr, and I am the Vice President of the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe. For the Paiute Tribe, this bill is about so much more than water. Not only does this historic bill resolve the water rights of three tribes and represent the efforts of 39 parties --- for the Paiutes, it is the resolution to several decades of living as strangers in our own lands. It provides our members with water, and it ratifies a 24-year-old treaty to establish and recognize the San Juan Southern Paiute Reservation.

I have lived in Hidden Springs my entire life. It is a small community of San Jan Southern Paiute Tribal Members located near Tuba City, Arizona. Importantly, Hidden Springs sits within the boundaries of the Navajo Reservation. My family has been in this area for generations. Growing up it was always difficult to understand why the Paiutes have been living in the same area for so long, and yet don't have an exclusive reservation and are considered outsiders in our own homeland. We are hopeful that Senate Bill 4633 will rectify this unfortunate reality.

The San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe is a small tribe located in Northern Arizona and Southern Utah, within the boundaries of the Navajo Reservation. Most people don't know that a large part of the "Navajo Reservation," was actually set aside by Congress for the Navajo, Hopi, and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribes in 1934. While the Paiute Tribe has shared this territory with the Navajo Nation for more than 160 years, our Tribe was in this area long before the relocation of, or encroachment from other tribes.

As the only federally recognized tribe in Arizona without an exclusive reservation, we are unable to take advantage of basic services like funding opportunities that would provide our Tribal Members with livable homes, running water and electricity. All because we are a Tribe without a land base.

Generations of San Juan Southern Paiute have come and gone without ever seeing the creation of our exclusive homeland. The mental and emotional impact of being a landless, homeless Tribe is something I wouldn't wish on anyone.

Senate Bill 4633 will absolutely change things for my Tribe. You've heard about the water rights included in this legislation, and you'll hear more about the pipeline project and the ability to provide people with safe reliable drinking water. The water rights and the pipeline are crucial to all three tribes. For my Tribe, S. 4633 will ratify a treaty between the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe and the Navajo Nation that our Tribe has waited more than 24 years to see become a reality. This treaty will create the San Juan Southern Paiute Reservation, made up of a 5,100-acre Southern area near Tuba City, Arizona, and an additional 300-acre Northern Area near Navajo Mountain in Utah. All of this land is currently located within the Navajo Reservation.

Senate Bill 4633 not only ratifies the treaty and creates our reservation, but it also provides for the water we need to make our reservation a true homeland for our people. The funding provided by S. 4633 will help create the infrastructure necessary to serve our Tribal Members. We will be able to provide permanent housing, sanitation, water and electricity. These are necessities that most living off-reservation take for granted, but that my people have learned to live without, and we have lived harder lives because of it.

A tribe without land is a tribe without a future. Land is what allows tribes to develop economic opportunities, generate revenue, and continue to pass down our way of life to our children and our children's children.

My kids are starting to ask me the same questions I struggled with when I was young. Why don't we have a reservation? Why can't our people get running water or graze animals or have a homesite lease? Now, thanks to S. 4633, I have positive and hopeful answers for them that include the real possibility of someday soon providing my people, including my children, with the opportunity to build a future on the reservation.

With your help, this Treaty—this promise—that the Navajo Nation and the San Juan Southern Paiute Tribe made to each other 24 years ago, can finally be ratified. Please support Senate Bill 4633 and help my people claim our small place in this world.