



September 25, 2018

Office of the Governor

BY E-MAIL

And

First Class Mail

The Honorable Ryan K. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Room 6612
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Inaccurate and Damaging Press Release About Drug Bust
On San Felipe Reservation

Dear Secretary Zinke:

I write to express the deep displeasure of the Pueblo of San Felipe about the carelessly misleading press release issued by your office on September 12, 2018. Specifically, it was reported that Bureau of Indian Affairs law enforcement officers seized nearly seventeen pounds of methamphetamines and heroin on the Pueblo. The reality, of course, understood by your office but not by most members of the general public or even many of my tribal members, is that the officers stopped a non-Indian on a federal highway that runs through San Felipe tribal land miles away from our main village and tribal community.

The press release your office put out on September 12, which was picked up and widely publicized by numerous national and local news outlets, mischaracterized the location of the drug bust and erroneously implied that it occurred within our tribal community. While it is technically correct that the seizure occurred within the boundaries of the Pueblo of San Felipe, the public, not familiar with San Felipe or well versed in rights of way through tribal land, were left with the incorrect and damaging impression that Pueblo members were transporting illegal drugs within our community.

The title of the DOI press release declared that "Interior Law Enforcement Seizes 17 lbs. of Heroin and Methamphetamine on San Felipe Pueblo Indian Reservation in NM." That misleading characterization was inevitably further disseminated by other reporting, such as the headline in *The Hill*, stating "Interior law enforcement officers seize 17 pounds of heroin on reservation." The damage done to the Pueblo's public image is clear from the first two paragraphs of *The Hill* article, which stated:

Interior Department (DOI) law enforcement officers seized 17 pounds of heroin and methamphetamine drugs from an Indian reservation in New Mexico in August.

An officer within Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services found the drugs during a *traffic stop on the San Felipe Pueblo Indian Reservation* north of Albuquerque.

(Emphasis added).

This mischaracterization of the location of the drug seizure and your failure to address the complexity of Indian law criminal jurisdiction, federal interstate highways, and lack of clarification that the alleged perpetrators were non-San Felipe tribal members, have created an unacceptable public perception of our community. We are especially offended at the bad light that your press release casts on our beautiful and culturally vibrant tribal community and law abiding tribal members. Although our community is not immune to the problems of substance abuse addiction plaguing the rest of society, it is our Pueblo values and heritage that gives our tribal members the desire and resiliency to combat these detrimental addictions.

We ask you to immediately correct the press release to provide an accurate recitation of the facts. Specifically:

- The alleged trafficker is a non-Indian;
- The alleged trafficker is not a member of the Pueblo of San Felipe community;
- The drug seizure occurred on a busy federal interstate highway; and
- The Pueblo of San Felipe is extremely concerned about the impacts of drug use and abuse and related criminal activity affecting tribal and rural communities across our country.

We are immensely grateful for the work of the BIA in combating the distribution of drugs on tribal lands. But it is equally important that the federal government acknowledge and support tribal sovereignty and efforts to protect the health and safety of our tribal communities. To that end, we invite you to visit the Pueblo of San Felipe to meet with tribal leadership and members to discuss critical need for funding of our tribal law enforcement and inpatient and outpatient treatment centers for people struggling with drug addiction. An expression of your interest in our efforts and direct communication with the Pueblo, together with a prompt correction of the grossly misleading press release, would, we believe be an excellent exercise of the federal government's proper government-to-government relationship with the Pueblo of San Felipe.

Respectfully,

PUEBLO OF SAN FELIPE

By: 
Anthony Ortiz, Governor

cc: U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
The Hill, editor@thehill.com
KOB4, news@kob.com
Indianz.com, indianz@indianz.com

