

# After Tara Sweeney Tried To Direct Coronavirus Relief Funds Intended For Tribal Governments To Her Former Employer, Tribes' Sensitive Information Was Leaked

**Tara Sweeney Tried to Direct CARES-Act Payments Intended For Tribal Governments To Her Own For-Profit Corporation After It Sold ANWR Leases To BP & Chevron For \$22 Million**

## **Assistant Secretary Of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney Directed CARES Act Money Intended For Tribal Governments To Her Former Employer-- Contradicting Congress's Intent**

**Assistant Secretary Of Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney Played A Role In Directing CARES Act Money To Alaska Native Corporations And Away From Federally-Recognized Tribes.** "A high-ranking Interior Department official is under fire over her role in securing access to billions of dollars in coronavirus aid for a handful of wealthy Alaska corporations, including one that previously employed her as a lobbyist and top executive. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney is among a small group of Interior officials advising the Treasury Department on how to distribute \$8 billion in rescue funding Congress earmarked for Native American tribes." [*Politico*, [04/16/20](#)]

- **Sweeney Used To Work For One Of The Corporations Receiving Relief And Still Has Financial Interest In It.** "Sweeney's role has since come under intense scrutiny, with Democrats and several tribal organizations seizing on the financial interest she retains as a shareholder of her former employer, Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, according to financial disclosure forms." [*Politico*, [04/16/20](#)]

**Members Of Congress Want To Clarify That The Money Was Indeed Intended For Tribal Governments.** "— an allocation that some lawmakers now say they intended solely for the 574 federally recognized tribes hit hard by the economic shutdown. [...] "Tara Sweeney is diverting funds for tribal governments during coronavirus to for-profit Alaska Native Corporations," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer tweeted on Thursday. 'Sweeney used to be an exec for an ANC, and she wants to profit!'" [*Politico*, [04/16/20](#)]

**Tom Cole, A Republican Co-Chair Of The House's Native American Caucus, Agrees That The Funding Was Intended To Help Tribal Governments.** "Still, some Capitol Hill staffers have since told POLITICO the provision was sloppily worded, and in late March several House lawmakers submitted official statements seeking to clarify that the money should go to cover budget shortfalls faced by tribal governments. 'This fund would be used by tribal governments to offset the dramatic losses they are facing at this time,' Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.), who co-chairs the House's Native American Caucus, wrote in a colloquy entered into the Congressional Record." [*Politico*, [04/16/20](#)]

**The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation Paid Sweeney A Hefty Executive Salary.**

- Tara Sweeney's salary from ASRC was \$645,104.
- ASRC gave Sweeney a cash payment of \$321,023 as part of its employee incentive program. [OGE form 278e, [01/03/20](#)]

**Sweeney's Husband Is A Registered Lobbyist For Another Alaska Native Corporation Asking For CARES Act Funding Intended For Tribal Governments-- A Fact She Didn't Disclose In Her Ethics Filings**

**Sweeney's Husband, Kevin Sweeney, Is A Lobbyist With Connections To Trump's Campaign.** "As the nomination of Tara Sweeney to lead the Bureau of Indian Affairs sits in limbo, her husband has entered into a new deal. According to Alaska Public Media, a consulting company owned by Kevin Sweeney is being paid \$15,000 a month to promote the state of Alaska's natural gas project. The work is being done through Black Rock Group, a firm founded by Mike Dubke, who served as communications director for President Donald Trump for less than three months last year." [Indianz.com, [04/09/18](#)]

**One Of Kevin Sweeney's Active Lobbying Clients Is The Bristol Bay Native Corporation.** [Senate Lobbying Disclosure Database, accessed [04/20/20](#)]

- **Bristol Bay Native Corporation Has Paid Sweeney's Firm \$210,000 For Federal Lobbying Since 2019.** [Senate Lobbying Disclosure Database, accessed [04/20/20](#)]

**Bristol Bay Native Corporation Was Among The First To Apply For CARES Act Funding Intended For Tribal Governments.** "Alaska Native Corporations were among the first in line for an \$8 billion coronavirus relief fund, preliminary data obtained by Indianz.Com shows, confirming fears of tribes in the lower 48 about for-profit entities receiving a share of money promised to their governments. Secretary of the Treasury Steve Mnuchin announced the opening of the relief fund portal on Monday afternoon. By the end of the day, nearly every Alaska Native regional corporation -- including ones with millions of acres of privately-owned fee land -- had started the 'certification' process to obtain a share of COVID-19 relief money, according to the data. And as of Friday mid-day, all 12 Alaska Native regional corporations (ANCs) with land holdings applied, the data shows." [Indianz.com, [04/17/20](#)]

**Bristol Bay Native Corporation Signed An Op-Ed Defending Alaska Native Corporations For Seeking CARES Act Funding.** [*Anchorage Daily News*, [04/18/20](#)]

Tara Sweeney's Ethics Disclosure Makes No Mention That Her Husband Lobbies For Clients That May Have Business Before Interior. The filings don't even say that Six-7 strategies is a lobbying firm, instead describing its business as "management consulting." [Tara Sweeney Form 278e, [11/26/19](#)]

**The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation Leased ANWR Tracts To BP And Chevron For \$22 Million In 2017**

**The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation Sold Leases To BP And Chevron For \$22 Million After Congress Opened Up ANWR To Oil And Gas Drilling In 2017.** "The Alaska

Native regional corporation for the North Slope collected \$22.5 million from a pair of oil companies after Congress opened the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's coastal plain to drilling in 2017, according to corporate documents. Arctic Slope Regional Corp., whose 13,000 Alaska Native shareholders own the oil rights to 140 square miles along the coastal plain, has long been one of the most aggressive advocates for opening the refuge to oil development. The payment, referenced in ASRC's latest annual report, underscores just how much the corporation had to gain from the congressional action. It stands to benefit further if the oil companies, BP and Chevron, ultimately find and produce petroleum on its property." [Alaska Public Media, [01/08/20](#)]

**BP Was A Key Lobbyist In Convincing The Trump Administration To Open ANWR To Oil & Gas Extraction.** "Oil major BP played a key role in lobbying the Trump administration to allow oil and gas drilling in two previously protected areas of the Alaskan Arctic, Unearthed can reveal. Opening up the areas to exploration poses significant risks to the environment and will undermine efforts to meet the Paris climate targets to prevent catastrophic climate change. Writing to Trump administration officials, the company first lobbied for more areas to be opened up to drilling off the US coast and then welcomed plans to lease swathes of the Arctic's Beaufort Sea for oil and gas exploration, according to documents seen by Unearthed." [Unearthed, [05/19/19](#)]

- **BP America President SusanDio Said Opening Up ANWR Was A "Big Policy Victory."** "So when the US interior department kicked-off the leasing process for the area in April 2018, BP Alaska president, Janet Weiss, wrote to officials welcoming the move. A day after that letter was sent, BP's Susan Dio told a meeting of the Resource Development Council of Alaska (RDC) that the decision to permit drilling was a 'big policy victory.' In previously unreported comments, Dio said: 'Alaska won a big policy victory at the national level this past December when the federal government opened the door to oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.'" [Unearthed, [05/19/19](#)]

**When Asked About The Arctic Slope's BP And Chevron Leases As Part Of Her Confirmation Hearing, Sweeney Refused To Provide An Answer.** In the QFRs following Sweeney's confirmation hearing, Senator Cantwell asked, "Ms. Sweeney, we also understand that there are lease agreements for ASRC lands in the Arctic Refuge with BP and Chevron/ Texaco. Again, to make sure that we understand the potential conflicts that could come into plan with any BIA work related to these companies, please describe the details of these lease agreements and whether you think any of these arrangements will require you to recuse yourself from any matter that potentially involves BP or Chevron." [Tara Sweeney Confirmation QFR, [05/09/18](#)]

- **Sweeney Refused To Provide An Answer.** She responded, "The details of those arrangements are proprietary and the intellectual property of ASRC. Therefore, I do not have access to this information. I will comply with my ethics agreement and consult with OGE and/or DAEO on appropriate matters that may arise outside my agreement." [Tara Sweeney Confirmation QFR, [05/09/18](#)]

**BP Is In Negotiations To Sell Its Alaska Operations, But That Deal May Be In Limbo As Oil Markets Destabilize**

**BP Announced Plans To Sell All Its Alaska Operations To Hilcorp In August 2017.** "BP today announced that it has agreed to sell its entire business in Alaska to Hilcorp Alaska, based in Anchorage, Alaska. Under the terms of the agreement, Hilcorp will purchase all of BP's interests in the state for a total consideration of \$5.6 billion. The sale will include BP's entire upstream and midstream business in the state, including BP Exploration (Alaska) Inc., that owns all of BP's upstream oil and gas interests in Alaska, and BP Pipelines (Alaska) Inc.'s interest in the Trans Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS)." [BP, [08/27/19](#)]

**But Banks Are Skeptical About Financing Hilcorp's Purchase Of BP's Alaska Operations.** "BP PLC's sale of its Alaskan business is in jeopardy after a group of banks balked at financing the \$5.6 billion deal to buyer Hilcorp Energy Co. amid a historic rout of oil and gas prices, according to people familiar with the deal. A failure to complete the deal would be a blow to BP, which already has the highest debt labels-- in relation to its size-- among the major oil companies and is counting on the transaction to help reduce its debt. It is the largest deal involving oil and gas production assets globally." [*Wall Street Journal*, [04/09/20](#)]

**Regulators In Alaska Are Concerned About Hilcorp's Ability To Purchase BP's Alaska Operations.** "State regulators have asked Hilcorp, the independent oil company buying BP's Alaska assets, to disclose whether and how the pandemic-driven crash in oil prices will affect its ability to seal the \$5.6 billion deal. [...] Hilcorp has not said exactly how it plans to raise the full \$5.6 billion, but ratings agencies have said that heavy borrowing could cause them to reduce the company's credit rating. Two watchdog groups also say they're concerned about whether Hilcorp's debt levels could affect its ability to operate safely." [Alaska Public Media, [04/03/20](#)]

### **Tribes Are Calling For Sweeney To Resign For Her Role In Directing Relief Money To Her Former Employer**

**Great Plains Tribes Calling For The Removal Of Tara Sweeney For Her Role In Diverting CARES Funds Designated For Tribes To Alaska Native Corporations.** "A group of tribal leaders from North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska is calling for the removal of Tara Sweeney from the position of assistant secretary of Indian Affairs in the Interior Department over the inclusion of Alaska Native corporations in emergency money for tribes. The Great Plains Tribal Chairmen's Association contends Alaska Native corporations are not tribes and should not be allotted any of the \$8 billion set aside for them by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act. The association is made up of more than a dozen tribal chairmen and presidents from 16 tribes." [*Indian Country Today*, [04/14/20](#)]

- **The Plains Tribes Allege That Sweeney Directed The Money To 'State-Chartered, For-Profit Corporations' That Sweeney And Her Family Have A Financial Interest In.** "In a letter to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, the tribal association's chairman, Harold Frazier, Cheyenne River Sioux, and vice chairman, Harold Robert Flying Hawk, Yankton Sioux, wrote: 'She [Sweeney] has lost the confidence of Indian tribes. Charged with a large public trust, she unfairly sought to divert emergency Tribal Government resources to state-chartered for-profit corporations owned by Alaska Native shareholders, including

her and her family,' the letter stated. 'She seeks to deny the very existence of Indian country.'" [*Indian Country Today*, [04/14/20](#)]

**The National Congress of American Indians Says Sweeney's Choice "Doesn't Look Good."** "The National Congress of American Indians has argued that the language in the law doesn't allow for the corporations to receive aid designated for tribes. The group hasn't called for Sweeney to resign, but Allis said she should have recused herself from the matter because of her financial stake in Arctic Slope Regional. 'It just doesn't look good,' he said. 'Right or wrong, it doesn't look good.'" [*Politico*, [04/16/20](#)]

### **Tribes, Including Alaskan Tribes, Sued Over Sweeney's Actions, Resulting In A Federal Injunction**

**Three Alaska Tribes Have Joined A Lawsuit To Stop Alaska Native Corporations From Receiving CARES Act Funds.** "Three Alaska tribes have joined a federal lawsuit that seeks to stop Alaska Native corporations from receiving a share of \$8 billion in federal coronavirus funding. The lawsuit was filed in the district court of Washington D.C. on Friday by the Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, the Tulalip Tribes and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. The tribes from Washington and Maine are joined by three Alaska tribes: Akiak Native Community, Asa'carsamiut Tribe and Aleut Community of St. Paul Island." [KTUU, [04/17/20](#)]

- **The Six Tribes Say Alaska Native Corporations Shouldn't Qualify For CARES Act Funding Because They "Aren't Tribal Governments."** "The six tribes are suing U.S. Treasury Department Secretary Steve Mnuchin, arguing that for-profit Alaska Native corporations should not receive a share of the CARES Act. They are also seeking a temporary restraining order to stop the funding from being allocated on April 26, until the questions of eligibility can be resolved. According to the lawsuit, the language of the bill is unambiguous that CARES Act funding should only go to tribal governments. As Alaska Native corporations aren't tribal governments, they shouldn't qualify, the lawsuit states." [KTUU, [04/17/20](#)]

**A Federal Judge Has Put An Injunction On Disbursing CARES Act Money To Alaska Native Corporations In Response To The Tribes' Lawsuit.** "A federal judge filed a preliminary injunction Monday preventing the U.S. Treasury Department from distributing coronavirus relief funds to Alaska Native Corporations. Earlier in April, Confederated Tribes of the Chehalis Reservation, the Tulalip Tribes, and the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians filed suit against the Treasury Department to prevent the distribution of COVID-19 relief funds to Alaska Native Corporations. The Akiak Native Community, Asa'carsamiut Tribe and Aleut Community of St. Paul Island tribes also joined the suit as plaintiffs. The federally recognized tribal governments argued that Alaska Native Corporations do not meet the definition of an Indian tribe or tribal government, so they should not be eligible for the \$8 billion emergency aid available under Title V of the CARES Act." [KTUU, [04/27/20](#)]

**Tribes That Applied For Coronavirus Relief Have Found That Sensitive Financial Information Has Been Leaked. Now They Want An Investigation**

## **After Tribes Applied For The Relief, The Federal Government Leaked Their Bank Information**

**“Shoddy Document Handling” Has Lead To Tribal Applicants’ Sensitive Financial Information Leaking.** “As tribal leaders and their citizens work day and night to protect their vulnerable communities from the coronavirus, they are enduring yet another shock to their system. After spending an entire week battling the Trump administration over an \$8 billion COVID-19 relief fund, they discovered that their own government, the one that has charged itself with moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust, engaged in such shoddy document handling practices that their sensitive data, containing information about their people and their finances, landed in the hands of outsiders on Friday.” [Indianz.com, [04/20/20](#)]

- **Tribes Are Demanding An Investigation Into The Breach And Are Considering A Class Action Lawsuit.** “With tribes demanding investigations and weighing legal action, including a potential class action, the leak comes after nearly every Indian nation in the lower 48 expressed a lack of confidence in the government official who is supposed to prevent these kinds of intrusions. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Tara Sweeney has taken a prominent role in decisions affecting the \$8 billion coronavirus relief fund, so much so that the Department of the Interior admitted that her agency had its eyes all over the information that got out.” [*Indian Country Today*, [04/20/20](#)]
- **The Southern Ute Tribe Says Treasury Has Unlawfully Released Sensitive Information Provided By Tribes And Called For An Investigation.** “To make matters worse, on Friday evening we learned that the information provided to the Department of Treasury by every tribe in the country had been unlawfully released. The Southern Ute Indian Tribe has taken steps to make sure that its bank account is secure. But more importantly, the unlawful actions by one or more individuals at the federal government to leak this confidential information must be immediately investigated. We call upon the Department of Justice to immediately do so.” [*Indian Country Today*, [04/20/20](#)]
- **In An Editorial, Native News Online Called The Break “Inexcusable And Infensible,” Echoing Calls For An Investigation.** “The breach last Friday of tribal information supplied to the U.S. Department of Treasury for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds is completely inexcusable and indefensible. The source of this major breach is not fully known at this time. What is known is the Treasury Department and U.S. Department of the Interior each played a role in the collection of the information. There are plenty of theories floating around Indian Country as to who decided to take it upon him or herself to leak the information. The Department of Treasury and the Department of the Interior must immediately implement the necessary safeguards to ensure that no additional confidential information is released from either department or other federal agencies. Native News Online demands an apology to Indian Country and a full investigation of the tribal data breach starting at the Department of the Treasury’s Office of Inspector General.” [Native News Online, [04/20/20](#)]

**The Chairman Of The Winnebago Tribe Says The Data Breach Will Have “Lasting Impact And Damage.”** “Chairman Coly Brown of the Winnebago Tribe released the following statement on April 18, 2020, in connection with the leak of sensitive CARES Act data by the federal government. ‘Tribes do not like to share their data but in order to access these critical funds to protect the health and safety of our members under the CARES Act, we did. Now, our worst fears are confirmed and there has been a leak of that data. I worry about the lasting impact and damage to our Tribal Nations by this leak. I echo the call for an immediate investigation into the matter.’” [Indianz.com, [04/18/20](#)]

### **Senators Heinrich And Udall Have Called For Inspector General Investigations Into Sweeney’s Attempt To Divert The Money To Corporations and The Data Breach**

**Senator Udall Has Sent Letters To The Inspectors General At Interior And Treasury Asking For An Investigation Into Sweeney’s Attempt To Divert The Money To ANCs And The Data Breach.** “U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-N.M.), vice chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, formally requested official reviews by the Office of Inspector General (OIG) for both the Department of the Treasury and the Department of the Interior into two concerns raised by Tribal governments in New Mexico and across the country related to the Trump administration’s handling of COVID-19 relief funding for Tribes. In a letter to the Offices of the Inspectors General for the U.S. Departments of the Treasury and Interior, Udall said he appreciated that the OIGs are already actively pursuing these concerns. Udall requested that the offices now undertake full and formal reviews of the issues at hand.” [Sen. Udall Press Release, [04/29/20](#)]

**Senator Heinrich Is Also Asking Interior And Treasury’s Inspectors General To Investigate.** “One United States senator is calling for an investigation into the breach of sensitive tribal data that occurred on Friday, April 17, 2020. The breached data was information supplied by tribes and Alaska Native Corporations to the U.S. Department of Treasury and the U.S. Department of the Interior for Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act funds. Eleven days after the breach occurred, the source is still not known. U.S. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) issued the following statement, calling for an investigation into the release of the sensitive information: ‘I am disappointed and concerned by the release of sensitive data that Native American communities provided the Department of Treasury and Department of Interior. Tribal nations in New Mexico are facing a disproportionate impact to their populations due to the coronavirus pandemic and access to the \$8 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund is vital to their response and recovery efforts. I am calling for an immediate and thorough investigation by both departments’ Inspectors General to identify the source and motivation for the release of this private tribal information.’” [Native News Online, [04/28/20](#)]