

## *Tribal Leaders Gather in Nation's Capitol for Third White House Tribal Nations Conference*



White House Photo by Pete Souza

Following through on his campaign promise to strengthen government-to-government relations with tribes, President Obama hosted the third annual White House Tribal Nations Conference in Washington, D.C. just before the New Year. A cornerstone of the Administration's outreach and engagement efforts with tribal governments, the conference provided leaders from the 565 federally recognized tribes the opportunity to interact directly with the President and representatives from his Administration.

Members of the President's cabinet and other federal officials focused on addressing the needs and aspirations of Indian communities. During the opening and closing sessions, tribal leaders heard from Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, OMB Deputy Director Heather Higginbottom and Education Secretary Arne Duncan. Tribal leaders also participated in breakout sessions with Senior Administration Officials, including Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and SBA Administrator Karen Mills.

"This is about continuing a meaningful nation-to-nation dialogue that furthers the march of progress happening in Indian Country," Secretary Salazar said. "President Obama is committed to making government work better to fulfill our trust management duties, support tribal self-determination and

empower American Indian and Alaska Natives to unlock the economic potential of Indian communities."

Speaking to a packed audience at the Department of Interior consisting of invited tribal leaders and distinguished guests from across the U.S., the President spoke on a range of issues affecting Indian Country. "What you expect – and what you deserve – is a federal government that helps, not hinders, your efforts. You deserve leaders in Washington who fight for you every single day. That's one of the reasons I ran for this office."

The President received cheers and enthusiastic applause on a number of points throughout his ten-minute speech. "When I visited the Crow Nation during the campaign, I said my job was not just to win an election; it was to make sure that Washington starts focusing on you. I promised a true government-to-government relationship – a relationship that recognizes our sometimes painful history, a relationship that respects the unique heritage of Native Americans and that includes you in the dream that we all share."

Prior to the conference, the President signed an Executive Order that established the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education. The Initiative will help expand educational opportunities and improve educational outcomes for American Indian and Alaska Native students, including opportunities to learn their Native languages

and cultures, and receive a complete and competitive education that prepares them for college and a career. The Initiative is also committed to strengthening tribal colleges and universities. “We have to prepare the next generation for the future – which is why, earlier today, I signed an executive order to launch the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education,” the President said.

Also during the conference, the Department of Interior announced a sweeping reform of federal surface leasing regulations for American Indian lands that will streamline the approval process for home ownership, expedite economic development and is poised to spur renewable energy development in Indian Country. The proposed rule would modify regulations governing the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ process for approving the lease of surface acres on lands the federal government holds in trust for tribes and individuals, which includes 56 million surface acres, proving to be the most comprehensive reform of Indian land leasing rules in over 50 years. The Secretarial Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform was also activated by naming five prominent tribal leaders to a new national commission to undertake a forward-looking, comprehensive evaluation of how Interior manages nearly \$4 billion in American Indian trust funds.

Additionally, Secretary Salazar and Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Larry Echo Hawk announced the Tribal



Consultation Policy for the Department of the Interior. The new policy emphasizes trust, respect and shared responsibility in providing tribal governments an expanded role in informing federal policy that impacts Indian Country. “The new framework institutionalizes meaningful consultation so that tribal leaders are at the table and engaged when it comes to the matters that affect them,” Secretary Salazar said. This new

Thank you

President Obama for helping  
Indian Country during the  
Tribal Nations Conference.

Gun-Ney-Gay,  
Quapaw Tribe of Oklahoma

Chairman John L. Berrey,  
Vice-Chairman Thomas Mathews,  
Tamara Smiley, Flossie Mathews,  
Marilyn Rogers, Ranny McWatters, T.C. Bear



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policy announcement builds upon President Obama's directive that all federal agencies develop ways to improve communication and consultation with tribal leaders to generate positive solutions for issues affecting the First Americans. "Under this policy, consultation will be an open, transparent and deliberative process," said Assistant Secretary Echo Hawk. "Forging a strong role for American Indian and Alaska Native tribes at all stages in the government's decision-making process will benefit Indian Country and federal policy for generations to come."

Salazar also announced the promising results of a pilot program to reduce the high incidence of violent crime on four Indian reservations. The Safe Indian Communities initiative, a two-year program that included targeted community policing, achieved a 35 percent overall decrease in violent crime across the four communities, far exceeding the initial target of five percent. "We know that safer Indian communities mean stronger Indian communities," said Salazar. "The positive results from the pilot program are extremely encouraging and far surpassed our goals. We are committed to building on that progress and will be expanding the Safe Indian Communities initiative to other reservations that are experiencing high levels of violent crime."

The administration and FEMA also announced a joint effort to amend the Stafford Act to allow federally recognized tribal governments to make a request directly to the President

for a federal emergency or disaster declaration.

These initiatives build on other Administration accomplishments on behalf of tribal nations over the past three years, including the historic \$3.4 billion Cobell Settlement that addresses long-standing injustices; \$1 billion in settlements to meet the critical water needs of Native American communities; the Tribal Law and Order Act, which allowed federal agencies to accelerate their focus on safe tribal communities; and acquiring more than 157,000 acres of land in trust on behalf of tribal nations.

With the furry of events surrounding the conference nearing a close, the President wrapped up the third annual White House Tribal Conference by remarking, "I believe that one day, we're going to be able to look back on these years and say that this was a turning point. This was the moment when we began to build a strong middle class in Indian Country; the moment when businesses, large and small, began opening up in reservations; the moment when we stopped repeating the mistakes of the past, and began building a better future together, one that honors old traditions and welcomes every Native American into the American Dream. And when you go back home, making your communities better places to live, I want you all to know that you've got a partner in Washington. You have an administration that understands the challenges that you face and, most importantly, you've got a President who's got your back." ♣

## Senate Indian Affairs Committee Oversight Hearing *Deficit Reduction and Job Creation: Regulatory Reform in Indian Country*



U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs



U.S. Senator Al Franken (D-Minnesota), Senate Committee on Indian Affairs



U.S. Senator John Barrasso (R-Wyoming), Vice-Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs



U.S. Senator Tom Udall (D-New Mexico), Senate Committee on Indian Affairs



Jefferson Keel, President, National Congress of American Indians



Jacqueline Johnson, Executive Director, National Congress of American Indians



Doug O'Brien, Deputy Under Secretary for Rural Development, U.S. Department of Agriculture



Geoffrey Blackwell, Chief, Office of Native Affairs & Policy, Federal Communications Commission



Ben Shelly, President, Navajo Nation



Pearl E. Casias, Chairwoman, Southern Ute Indian Tribe



Cedric Cromwell, Chairman, Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe



U.S. Senator Daniel K. Akaka (D-Hawaii), Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs held an oversight hearing on Deficit Reduction and Job Creation: Regulatory Reform in Indian Country. The purpose of the hearing was to examine how federal agencies support tribes in accessing capital for development and business operations; support tribal infrastructure development, especially broadband; and reform regulatory and administrative procedures to improve the success and sustainability of tribal economic development.