

In Their Own Words

Indian Gaming Magazine spoke with tribal leaders and federal representatives about how President Obama's White House Tribal Nations Conferences have evolved over the last eight years, and what they would like to see future administrations adopt from the Obama Administration when working with tribes. Here is what they had to say...

W. Ron Allen, Chairman Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe



“President Obama made a commitment to us eight years ago. Step-by-step, year after year, he's lived up to those commitments and promises. He has done a great job strengthening tribal sovereignty and authority, and addressing the many issues we are challenged with. He has set a new bar for any future administration

regarding the commitment to Indian Country by helping us become self-governing and self-reliant.

Over the last twenty years – beginning with President Clinton and moving forward to President Obama – little by little, America is realizing that it has many promises and it can't live up to those promises through federal resources alone. The real solution is to empower tribal governments to be able to become self-reliant again and a vibrant part of America's social and economic fiber. The answer is strengthening our tribal governments and helping us to be able to serve our community. My message to future administrations is ‘don't be afraid of us; be supportive of us.’ We are partners in America's future. Do what you can do to continue the trend and commitment that President Obama has made.”

Jonodev Chaudhuri, Chairman National Indian Gaming Commission (NIGC)

“This is the eighth and final White House Tribal Nations Conference of the Obama Administration. It was an absolute sea change when President Obama came into office and started hosting this annual conference. It grew out of a promise he made prior to starting office at the Crow Nation, where he committed to having a substantive, meaningful discussion on a regular basis with Indian Country leadership. He has been true to his word.

From an agency perspective, one of the benefits of this conference as I've seen it evolve, is the work that agencies put forth in the lead up to the conference in making sure that their agendas remain consistent with the larger federal administration



agenda for Indian Country, and that any relevant initiatives or decisions get teed up if all possible for discussion at this event. This has helped galvanize discussion within the federal family around larger federal Indian policy issues, and from a federal agency perspective, we welcome the opportunity every year to come to the White

House Tribal Nations Conference to talk about how our agency is honoring its trust relationship to Indian Country, and engaging in meaningful, ongoing consultation with tribal leadership.

Tribes have been effective and are increasingly effective in holding all governmental entities accountable, especially entities within the federal government. We have a historic Administration under the Obama Administration in honoring our responsibilities from a nation-to-nation perspective. It's important tribes engage in productive dialogue, insist the progress that's been made continues and is institutionalized, and that all agencies maintain their commitment – regardless of who's at the head of any administration – to consultation and the honoring of the trust relationship.”

Brian Cladoosby, Chairman of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and President of NCAI



“I've been blessed to have had the opportunity to be at all eight White House Tribal Nations Conferences. We are witnessing history. Never before in the history of this greatest country in the world has a president committed this much time to Native Americans. It is unprecedented the accomplishments that this

man has achieved – they're just too numerous to list off. We're just fortunate that we have a President who is sincere and really cares about the issues facing Native Americans, especially our youth.”

Juana Majel-Dixon
Pauma Band of Luiseño Mission Indians



“When the White House Tribal Nations began eight years ago it was the first opportunity we’ve had to have a straight-up conversation with the President of this country. As a result, we received the Consultation Executive Order, which required all of the federal partners to fall in line and have consultation with tribes. This created a very definite shift in responsibility, and a shared responsibility, between the tribes and the federal partners.

This doesn’t mean everything got resolved, but it does give us clarity, and I’m hoping the next president takes the example of this Administration, because when you’re in a government-to-government relationship – sovereign-to-sovereign – it’s entirely different.”

Donna Bia, Staff Assistant – Deputy Bureau Director of Field Operations Bureau of Indian Affairs



“The White House Tribal Nations Conference is tremendous and the Obama Administration has focused on Indian Country and the needs of Indian people. Tribes feel that their voices are being heard, and it’s brought the community together. Instead of being apart like we once were, we’re actually standing as one nation.

My hope is for future administrations to continue with this conference and to continue to hear the voices of the Indian people and Indian Country – just to listen – that’s all we’re asking for.”

Leonard Forsman, Chairman The Suquamish Tribe

“The White House Tribal Nations Conference has been important and crucial to the progress tribes have made since President Obama has been in office. Not only is it an opportunity for us to ceremonially meet and exchange information, it also is an opportunity for the President to check in with his Cabinet and agency officials on the progress being made in Indian Country. Every year, it’s like a report card for him. He’s done so much for the tribes of the United States with regard to our budget, improving consultation, settling lawsuits, land and water claims and also getting some great initiatives going including Generation Indigenous for tribal youth as well as emphasizing education and economic development. I’m proud and happy to



be here at the Eighth Annual White House Tribal Nations Conference. I’ve been fortunate enough to attend all eight of them, so I’ve been able to track how things have gone and am really proud of the President, who I believe, is the best president for American Indians in the history of the United States.

President Obama has set a great example on how to work with the tribes of the United States and really honored the constitutional requirement that the treaties are the supreme law of the land. He’s shown true, meaningful diplomacy with American Indian tribes.”

Jefferson Keel, Lieutenant Governor Chickasaw Nation



“This event has gotten larger and more people are attending, because tribal leaders are interested in the current events and things that are happening in the country today, especially in Indian Country. With the economy the way it is, it’s important that tribal leaders come together and stay united to take our message to Congress.

I’d ask future administrations to continue to host these types of events so that tribal leaders have access to the president and to Cabinet secretaries throughout the federal government, and to remember the trust relationship that we have – this government-to-government relationship that’s been established. It’s important future administrations continue that – regardless of party. I would encourage future administrations to put the first people in the light that they need to be held in. I’d ask them to honor treaties, federal trust responsibilities and continue to do these types of events.

President Obama has kept his word. He made commitments to Indian Country and he’s held firm to those, even when it’s not necessarily the most popular thing to do. He’s brought Indian Country and our concerns to the forefront. You look at the trust settlements that we’ve had such as water, our trust, the Cobell settlement – all of those things came because of his influence and his interest in helping Native Americans. I give him all the credit for working with tribal leaders and including tribal leaders in these decisions.”

Aaron Payment, Chairman Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

“We take for granted that consultation happens now and that tribal advisory committees are in the norm. That’s not



necessarily the case, depending on who is president. President Obama established a very high standard. It's evolved to a point of accountability where tribal leaders look to see what the President has in store for us next, what has he accomplished since last year, and the Administration usually has had some meat and potatoes every time that

we've come to this conference.

For the next administration, I would hope they look to the Obama Administration for setting the standard and continue the government-to-government relationship that President Obama set in his executive order, and in the executive order that created the White House Council, and also these annual meetings.

We've come to depend on this process and expect it – this level of accountability, which was created by President Obama. The next president gets to choose whether or not to continue that. I believe there is one candidate will honor and respect it.”

Dr. Tamarah Pfeiffer, Associate Deputy Director for Navajo Schools Bureau of Indian Education



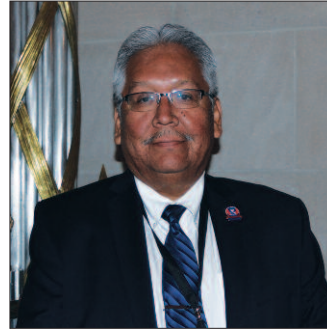
“I've been very impressed with this Administration's outreach with Indian Country. The whole initiative for tribal sovereignty, building tribal initiatives and really giving back from the federal government the responsibilities back to the tribes, has been something that I think has been a lifetime of initiatives. I'm really impressed

with the work of Secretary Jewell and President Obama.

For the next administration, it's about continuity – knowing that there's a deep history with each individual tribe and working closely with each tribe on their initiatives moving forward. I'm so impressed with Gen-I, and the work to focus on the children. In Indian Country, we know that it's seven generations of bringing forward these kinds of initiatives. We're just at the beginning – and we're very thankful.”

Terry Rambler, Chairman San Carlos Apache Tribe

“When President Obama first came into office, he promised a different kind of relationship between the federal government and tribes based on trust, communication, involvement and coordination. In my opinion he has delivered on that ever since the first White House Tribal Nations



Conference, through today.

There have been a lot of accomplishments under his Administration and he has taken consultation very seriously. To tribes, that's very important. Consultation is when we sit across the table from key decision makers, not the lower staff, and he's made that possible. Now we are able to sit across

from the secretaries of different agencies. We've been able to talk. We make decisions on our end and they make decisions on their end. It's a good approach and I'm very happy for that. I'll be sad to see President Obama go, but his term is up.

We've come a long way in eight years. There is no reason to undo that. What we need to do is continue to build on what President Obama has started with tribes and continue moving forward in a positive direction. There is a lot the next administration can build on using President Obama's record as a blueprint.”

Lynn “Nay” Valbuena, Chairwoman San Manuel Band of Mission Indians



“The White House Tribal Nation's Conferences have been about moving forward in a positive way, and continuing to build relationships and collaborate with President Obama and his Administration. It's been wonderful since the beginning, eight years ago, when President Obama first started tribal consultations. For

tribal leaders, having the White House summit every year brings us all closer together and unites us. It keeps everybody on track and has been a wonderful experience.

This year, I moderated an armchair discussion with Secretary King from the Department of Education and Secretary Perez from the Department of Labor. We talked about what their accomplishments have been with tribes during their tenure. The discussion was also about continuing to move forward and accomplish some of the things they had not accomplished yet. Most importantly, we wanted to hear from them to see how they felt about Indian Country and some of the important issues we're experiencing now.

For future administrations, I would hope they mirror what President Obama started eight years ago by continuing the White House summits, continuing the outreach to tribes and visiting reservations, because it's not just about gaming, it's about everything. With five hundred and sixty seven federally recognized tribes in the entire nation, we are all so diverse.” ♣