

Obama Administration Record for American Indians and Alaska Natives

“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.” - President Barack Obama, December 2, 2011

Since taking office, President Obama and his Administration have made tremendous progress on the major issues of concern to Indian Country. Underlying this progress is President Obama’s belief that tribal leaders must be part of the solution to problems and have a seat at the table. The President has hosted White House Tribal Nations Conferences, where tribal leaders have had discussions with the President and Cabinet officials. In addition, the President signed a memorandum directing Federal agencies to fully implement an Executive Order on tribal consultation. These actions have led to greater tribal consultation and feedback, which has helped shape the Administration’s policy priorities for American Indians and Alaska Natives. These include improving the quality of care offered by the Indian Health Service, promoting economic development in Indian Country, and making tribal communities safer. The Obama Administration’s record in support of Native Americans includes:

- **Strengthening the Government-to-Government Relationship:** In 2009, President Obama signed a memorandum to signal a new era in the government-to-government relationship with Indian Tribes. The President directed every agency to develop detailed plans to fully implement Executive Order 13175, “Consultation and Coordination with Tribal Governments.” Federal agencies have submitted the required plans and progress reports, and consultations are at historic levels. In addition, the President has hosted three White House Tribal Nations Conferences, inviting tribal leaders from each of the 565 Federally recognized tribes to meet with Cabinet secretaries and senior Administration officials. Consistent with the Administration’s goal to strengthen the government-to-government relationship, in December 2011, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced support for amending Federal law to allow Federally recognized Indian tribes to make emergency or disaster declaration requests directly to the President.
- **Improving Health Care:** President Obama signed into law the Affordable Care Act, which is improving the quality of health care and making it more accessible and affordable for all Americans, including Native Americans. The law permanently authorized the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the cornerstone legal authority for the provision of health care to American Indians and Alaska Natives. The Act ensures new and expanded programs and services available for those who use the Indian Health Service, which includes approximately two million American Indians and Alaska Natives. American Indians and Alaska Natives are also eligible for tax credits and cost sharing assistance through Affordable Insurance Exchanges. In addition, First Lady Michelle Obama launched *Let’s Move in Indian Country* which brings together Federal agencies, local communities, nonprofits, corporate partners, and tribes to end the epidemic of childhood obesity in Indian Country within a generation by creating a healthy start on life for children; ensuring families have access to healthy, affordable, and traditional foods; and increasing opportunities for physical activity.

- **Promoting Sustainable Economic Development in Indian Country:** President Obama has taken significant steps to promote the economic well-being of Native Americans. Through the Recovery Act, President Obama provided more than \$3 billion to help tribal communities renovate schools on reservations, spur job creation in tribal economies, improve housing and energy efficiency, and support health facilities and policing services. Recognizing that Indian Country faces unique challenges when it comes to sustainable economic development, the White House Rural Council is working across Federal agencies to address these challenges and promote economic prosperity and quality of life in Indian Country and across rural America. The Administration has made important investments in infrastructure to support economic development in Indian Country. Both the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Commerce have dedicated programs to bring high-speed, affordable broadband into tribal communities and have awarded loans and grants worth over \$1.5 billion for projects to benefit tribal areas.
- **Making Tribal Communities Safer:** President Obama signed the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) into law in July 2010. The TLOA gives tribes greater sentencing authority; improves defendants' rights; establishes new guidelines and training for officers handling domestic violence and sex crimes; strengthens services to victims; helps combat alcohol and drug abuse; helps at-risk youth; and expands recruitment and retention of Bureau of Indian Affairs and tribal officers and gives them better access to criminal databases. Also, in July 2011, the Department of Justice submitted a legislative proposal to Congress that would recognize certain tribes' power to exercise concurrent criminal authority over domestic violence cases, regardless of whether the defendant is Indian or a non-Indian. This proposal would significantly improve safety for Native American women and allow Federal and tribal law enforcement agencies to hold more perpetrators of domestic violence accountable for their crimes.
- **Resolving Longstanding Disputes:** President Obama has resolved several significant and longstanding Native American legal claims against the United States. In 2010, the Administration reached a \$760 million settlement with Native American farmers and ranchers in the *Keepseagle* case, which alleged discrimination by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) in loan programs. President Obama also signed into law the Claims Resolution Act which includes the *Cobell* settlement agreement. This class-action lawsuit regarding the U.S. government's trust management and accounting of over 300,000 individual American Indian trust accounts had been long-running and highly contentious. The Claims Resolution Act also included four water settlements, benefitting seven tribes in Arizona, Montana, and New Mexico. In addition, in October 2011, the Administration reached a final settlement of a long-standing lawsuit by the Osage Tribe. The United States will pay the Osage Nation \$380 million to compensate historical losses to its trust funds and interest income as a result of the government's management of trust assets.
- **Addressing Indigenous Issues:** The President announced the United States' support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People in response to calls from many tribal leaders. President Obama and his Administration are working to improve relations with indigenous peoples by looking to the principles embodied in the Declaration in

its dealings with Federally recognized tribes, while also working with all indigenous individuals and communities in the United States.

- **Supporting Education:** In December 2011, President Obama signed an Executive Order that established the White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education to help expand educational opportunities and improve outcomes for these communities. This initiative will help give each hard working member of these communities a fair shot at getting into college or finding a job, and will strengthen tribal colleges and universities.
- **Ensuring Greater Representation for Native Americans:** To ensure that Native Americans are represented in this Administration, President Obama appointed Larry Echo Hawk of the Pawnee Nation as Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, Dr. Yvette Roubideaux of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe as the Director of the Indian Health Service, Hilary Tompkins of the Navajo Nation as the Solicitor of the Interior, Lillian Sparks of the Rosebud and Oglala Sioux Tribes as Commissioner for the Administration for Native Americans, Tracie Stevens of the Tulalip Tribes as Chairwoman of the National Indian Gaming Commission, Charles Galbraith of the Navajo Nation as Associate Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, Kimberly Teehee of the Cherokee Nation as Senior Policy Advisor in the White House Domestic Policy Council, and others. Working with tribal leaders, this team is helping shape Federal policies that impact tribal communities.
- **Expanding Access to Federal Contracting for Businesses Owned by American Indians and Alaska Natives:** The White House launched an interagency initiative to increase contracting with small businesses. Through Fiscal Year 2011, over 30 percent of Federal agency Recovery Act contracting dollars, totaling nearly \$11 billion, have gone into the hands of small businesses; more than 16 percent, totaling \$6 billion, went to minority-owned firms. Additionally, for non-Recovery Act funds, small businesses owned by American Indians and Alaska Natives were awarded nearly \$8.7 billion in Fiscal Year 2010 alone.
- **Cutting Taxes and Expanding Access to Credit for Businesses Owned by American Indians and Alaska Natives:** President Obama has helped firms owned by American Indians and Alaska natives by cutting taxes for small businesses and helping them get the loans they need to grow and hire. Between 2009 and 2011, over 1,000 Small Business Administration supported-loans, totaling nearly \$328 million, went to small businesses owned by American Indians and Alaska Natives.
- **Fighting for Economic Security for American Indian and Alaska Native Families:** In the last two years, 3.9 million private sector jobs have been created. Putting Americans back to work and restoring economic security to families struggling because of the economic crisis remains the President's top priority. He's taken a series of steps to spur economic growth, get Americans back to work, and restore middle class security.
 - **Putting Americans Back to Work:** In 2009, President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, creating jobs, spurring economic growth, and investing in our communities. A report from the non-partisan Congressional Budget

Office showed that the Recovery Act, at its peak impact, increased employment by as many as 3.5 million jobs.

- **Taking Action to Strengthen the Recovery:** The President fought to continue the payroll tax cut into 2012, ensuring that taxes do not go up on nearly 1.5 million American Indian and Alaska Native workers, and to extend unemployment insurance so that Americans looking for work do not lose this crucial support. In addition, the President has put forward a broader jobs package that would cut taxes for small businesses, put teachers and first responders back on the job, help the unemployed get back to work, and rebuild our infrastructure.
- **Providing Tax Relief for American Indian and Alaska Native Families:** In December 2010, the President passed a bipartisan tax cut agreement that not only secured vital tax relief and investments for our workers, but is also creating jobs and accelerating economic growth. Building off the Recovery Act, the tax agreement extended key expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.