



# ACHIEVING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR TRIBAL NATIONS

Synopsis of the  
2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference

MARCH 2013







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We would like to thank Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar for providing the venue for the 2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference and our diligent note takers.

We would also like to thank all tribal leaders and participants for taking part in this important government-to-government conversation and look forward to our continued collaboration and dialogue.

**Disclaimer:** Summaries of the main themes and topics raised by tribal leaders who attended the break-out sessions are included in this report. This synopsis serves as a record of the issues raised at each session and does not necessarily reflect the policy positions of the Obama Administration.



## Executive Summary

December 5, 2012 marked the fourth consecutive White House Tribal Nations Conference, where President Obama reinforced his commitment to strengthen the nation to nation relationship and continue progress in improving the lives of Native Americans. All 566 federally recognized tribes were invited to send a representative. Cabinet members from the Departments of the Interior, Education, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Labor, Transportation, and the Environmental Protection Agency participated along with senior administration officials from the Departments of Treasury, Justice, Small Business Administration, Office of Management and Budget, Department of Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Office of National Drug and Control Policy, and the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness. Essential to the success of the Conference is not only the high level participation from the Administration but also the participation of tribal leaders, with over 300 tribal leaders attending the 2012 Conference. Interaction between tribal leaders and federal officials is critical to advancing progress on the myriad of issues facing tribal governments. The purpose of this synopsis is to reflect the exchange of ideas between tribal leaders and the federal officials at the Conference.



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*Photo by Pete Souza*

In President Obama's keynote remarks, he reflected on the recent passing of his adoptive Crow father, Sonny Black Eagle, and celebrated his "remarkable life," noting that "Sonny's story is not just one man's journey to keep his culture alive, but one country's journey to keep perfecting itself." After losing his mother to tuberculosis, Black Eagle was raised by his grandparents in Montana. They taught him both the traditions and the language of the Crow people. As a child, however, Black Eagle had to contend with teachers who would strike him for speaking the Crow language in school, and as a young man, he was confronted by racism and segregation.

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Like many Native Americans, Sonny experienced intolerance and injustice. He also “lived to see a government that turned the page on a troubled past and adopted a new policy towards Native Americans—a policy centered on self-determination and the right for tribal governments to do whatever you think is best to strengthen your communities.”

Over the past 40 years, this policy has had a major impact in moving tribal communities forward. Since 2009, President Obama has worked to build on this approach, making sure that tribal leaders have a seat at the table in finding solutions to the unique challenges facing Indian Country.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior  
*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

“We’ve focused on justice and tribal sovereignty,” the President said. “Long-standing legal disputes, like the Cobell case, have been resolved. I signed into law the Tribal Law and Order Act, which is helping to fight crime. These are all important steps. But we’ve got more to do. With domestic violence so prevalent on reservations, we’re pushing Congress to restore your power to bring to justice anyone—Indian or non-Indian—who hurts a woman. With some tribal nations unable to put their land into federal trust, we’re pushing Congress to pass the *Carcieri* fix right away.”

President Obama recognizes that there is more work to be done, and pledged to continue to work together with tribal leaders.

President Obama’s commitment continues the advances made by all agencies within the Administration. Administration officials discussed these advances during the Conference’s morning session. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the release of a Sacred Sites Report by the US Department of Agriculture, outlining how the agency plans to work more closely with tribal governments in the protection of - and appropriate access to - Indian sacred sites. Secretary Vilsack also announced a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Defense, Energy and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation to improve the protection and preservation of Indian sacred sites. In an effort to implement an important provision of the Affordable Care Act, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius announced an agreement between the Indian Health Service and Veterans Health Administration. Also, Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Neal Wolin announced that the Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service have developed new proposed guidance that lays out broad tax exclusions for income Indian tribal governments provide to tribal members. Finally, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar reiterated the importance of the issuing a final rule on approving the surface leases related to business, home ownership and renewable energy resource development and announced the Department of Education, the Bureau of Indian Education and the Administration for Native Americans issued a Memorandum of Agreement on Native Languages preservation.

## Protecting our Communities: Law Enforcement and Disaster Relief

**James Cole**, Deputy Attorney General, Department of Justice

**Craig Fugate**, Administrator, Department of Homeland Security

**Kevin Washburn**, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Department of the Interior

**Pamela Hyde**, Administrator, Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

**Tonya Robinson**, Special Assistant to the President for Justice and Regulatory Policy, White House Domestic Policy Council  
Lynn Rosenthal, White House Advisor on Domestic Violence, Office of the Vice President

**Todd Batta**, Senior Advisor, Department of Agriculture

**Felix Chavez**, Deputy Chief of Operations Division, Office of Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security

**Michael Fisher**, Chief, Office of Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security

**Steve Golubic**, Director of Tribal Affairs, Department of Homeland Security

**Subhash Paluru**, Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary, Power Systems Engineering R&D Department of Energy

**RADM Steve Poulin**, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs, U.S. Coast Guard  
Tim Purdon, U.S. Attorney for North Dakota, Department of Justice

**Rod K. Robinson**, Director, Office of Indian Alcohol and Substance Abuse, Department of Health and Human Services  
Kirsten Riesbeck, Government Relations, U.S. Coast Guard

**Ben Tucker**, Director of State, Local, and Tribal Affairs, Office of National Drug Control Policy  
Tracy Weeks, U.S. Forest Service



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

Photo by Tami Heilemann

## Law Enforcement Resources and Training

- Several tribal leaders raised the need for more law enforcement officers, improved training, and new or bigger detention facilities.
- Tribal leaders relayed their commitment to improving safety by using tribal resources to hire additional law enforcement officers and necessary equipment, but would like the federal government to meet their responsibilities to this end.
- Tribal governments are facing overcrowded detention systems and requested assistance to modernize and expand those systems.
- Some tribal leaders are concerned that smaller tribes receive little or no grants for law enforcement.
- Some tribal governments requested that federal law enforcement agencies, like the Federal Bureau of Investigation, have a larger presence on Indian Reservations due to the increase in violent crimes.
- Tribal leaders on large reservation expressed concern that expansive reservations complicated crime prevention and are seeking funding for substations to reduce response times.
- Tribal leaders are concerned that tribes are assessed higher fees to cover liability issues than is required for state or local law enforcement.
- A tribal leader worried about how to address police brutality and profiling by federal and state law officials.
- Tribal leaders requested officers receive *Special Law Enforcement Commission (SLEC)* training to facilitate participation in investigating federal crimes.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior  
*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

## Jurisdiction

- Tribal leaders in Public Law 83-280 (State Jurisdiction Over Offenses Committed by or Against Indians in the Indian Country Act) states worry about the lack of funding for tribal law enforcement.
- Tribal governments expressed frustration over the multiple jurisdictions on certain reservations and requested additional Indian Law training for federal officials serving on Indian reservations.
- Tribal leaders voiced concern that outside jurisdictions question tribal authorities regarding crime on Indian lands.



## Illegal Drug Trafficking

- Tribal leaders identified organized criminal activity in drug trafficking as a major issue, noting increased trends in prescription drugs, heroin, methamphetamines and marijuana.
- Tribal leaders are upset about the high rates of violence and drug-related deaths in tribal communities, and stated that drug trafficking has even reached schools.
- Tribal governments are struggling with “drug cartels” that use tribal and/or public lands near reservations to establish large-scale marijuana operations in hard to reach areas on Indian reservations.
- Tribal leaders pressed for a comprehensive federal response to crack down on drug-related offenses on Indian lands.
- Tribal leaders cited prescription drug abuse as a growing trend, including by children, and are concerned that in some cases, pharmacies cannot assist law enforcement due to protections in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA).
- Some tribal leaders asked for continuation of dedicated Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) liaisons to address methamphetamine abuse on Indian reservations and for federal assistance cleaning up former drug labs on Indian reservations. There was also a request to help destroy and remove marijuana gardens.
- Tribal governments are anxious about how states’ legalization of marijuana will impact Indian reservations, especially when the tribe has not legalized it.
- Tribal leaders said they confront international border issues with respect to drug enforcement, and wanted to continue to have positive relations with U.S. Border Protection, U.S. Coast Guard, and the DEA regarding drug trafficking.



Photo courtesy of  
the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

## Women and Children

- Tribal leaders pointed out high incidences of rape, domestic violence and drug use.
- Tribal leaders urged the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act with specific protections for Native women.
- Tribal leaders requested more focus on the issues surrounding human trafficking on Indian reservations.
- Tribal leaders worry that tribal children are raised by relatives who lack access to adequate resources.

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- Tribal leaders stated that Indian Child Welfare Act enforcement is a problem.
- A tribal leader complained that the oil and gas expansion has created more violence on tribal lands and requested vigorous prosecution of crimes on Indian reservations.

### Hunting

- Tribal leaders expressed gratitude for the federal government's support of hunting and fishing traditions and urged continued support.

### Disaster Relief

- Tribal governments want a disaster relief bill passed by Congress to alleviate the harm caused by historic drought.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

## Strengthening and Advancing the Government-to-Government Relationship

**David Hayes**, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior

**Tony West**, Associate Attorney General, Department of Justice

**Dallas Tonsager**, Under Secretary for Rural Development, Department of Agriculture

**Tracie Stevens**, Chair, National Indian Gaming Commission

**Stephanie Birdwell**, Director, Office of Tribal Government Relations, Department of Veterans Affairs

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

**Stacey Ecoffey**, Principal Advisor for Tribal Affairs, Office of Intergovernmental and External Affairs, Department of Health and Human Services

**Harold Hurtt**, Assistant Director of the Office of State, Local and Tribal Coordination, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Department of Homeland Security



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*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Legal Concerns and Legislation

- Tribal leaders expressed concerns that the Supreme Court decision in *Ramah* creates a federal obligation for fully funded indirect costs for tribes and wanted indirect costs taken out of the judgment fund rather than through program dollars.
- Tribal leaders suggested regular meetings to resolve issues related to contract support costs, especially with issues relating to the Department of Health and Human Services contract support cost obligations. Tribal leaders asked for support in the prevention of violence against women in Indian Country and passage of reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.

- Tribal leaders supported the Department of Justice taking an active role in educating other agencies as to the canons of Indian law, as well as the Indian Reorganization Act amendment requiring equal treatment of tribes.
- Tribal leaders noted the unfair treatment of tribes and their members who live in PL 83-280 states.

### Treaties with Indian Country

- Tribal leaders conveyed their disappointment with the federal government's failure to uphold its treaty obligations to Indian Country and wanted to see more involvement from the State Department in Indian Country matters since many tribal concerns stem from treaties and implicate the State Department's responsibilities.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

- Alaskan tribal leaders believe that international treaties carry the same weight as the United States Constitution, and that dealing with Alaska indigenous communities through the use of statutes violates international law.
- An Alaskan tribal leader thought that the decolonization of Alaska was not done according to the requirements of international law and that the disenfranchisement of Native Alaskans in the vote for statehood had lingering impacts on tribal interests.

### Tribal Lands

- Tribal leaders reemphasized the various problems that besiege tribes whose land had been confiscated by termination, yet following restoration, these tribes remain landless.
- Tribal leaders requested a federal departmental policy for landless tribes, pointing out that landless tribes feel like second-class citizens facing difficulties with housing, education, and economic development, as well as higher foreclosure and unemployment rates for their people.

### Sacred Sites

- Tribal leaders recommended an administration-wide policy on sacred sites in order to protect important tribal sites.
- Tribal leaders expressed concern with the process for determining sacred sites, finding it was unduly limited to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, leaving tribes out of the process and failing to consider non-tangible sacred elements.
- Tribal leaders requested that cultural resources go back to the people and that Tribal Historic Preservation Office money be increased.

## Tribal Trust

- Tribal leaders sought to clarify that the relationship between tribes and the federal government is nation to nation, as opposed to government-to-government.
- Tribal leaders voiced concerns about the threat of sequestration and wanted to see the nation to nation obligations protected from such budget cuts.
- Tribal leaders acknowledged that while meeting its trust obligations, the federal government must also balance the budget and asked that reductions impacting Indian Country go through tribal consultation.
- Tribal leaders urged departments like the Department of the Interior who have completed consultation policies follow up with tribal governments regarding the success and challenges of the implementation process.
- Tribal leaders urged tribal consultation at the Office of Management and Budget, due to the agency's overarching equities in federal agencies and their proposed policies.
- Tribal leaders stressed that the trust responsibility is holistic, not simply asset based and sought a modernization for the trust relationship with special emphasis on accountability rather than bureaucracy and patronization, especially at the lower levels of government.
- Tribal leaders want to see increased education for federal officials dealing with tribal issues and visits by high level government officials, including the President, to Indian Country in 2013.
- Tribal leaders sought expedited recognition of tribal leaders and wanted to establish a process where this agency recognition is considered a final agency action because the current BIA process is too resource and time intensive.

## Carcieri Fix

- Tribal leaders expressed a desire for the passage of a clean *Carcieri* fix and were concerned that without a clean *Carcieri* fix tribes could lose a fundamental aspect of their identity in relation to land interests.



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Photo by Tami Heilemann

## Strengthening Tribal Communities: Economic Development, Housing, Energy and Infrastructure

**Kathleen Merrigan**, Deputy Secretary, United States Department of Agriculture

**Marie Johns**, Deputy Administrator, Small Business Administration

**Mike Connor**, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Interior

**Jane Oates**, Assistant Secretary, Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor

**Rodger Boyd**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Native American Programs, Department of Housing and Urban Development

**John Garcia**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs

**Don Graves**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Small Business and Housing Policy, Department of the Treasury

**David Hinson**, Director, Minority Business Development Agency, Department of Commerce

**Christie Jacobs**, Director, Office of Indian Tribal Governments, Department of the Treasury

**Tracey LeBeau**, Director, Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs, Department of Energy

**Joanna Turner**, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Intergovernmental Affairs, Department of Transportation



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*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Taxation Issues

- Tribal leaders pointed to the power to tax as an important driver of tribal business and economic development, particularly sales tax that ends up going to state and local governments despite the commerce happening on tribal lands.

## BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

- Tribal leaders explained the difficulty of monetizing tax credits without infrastructure.
- Tribal leaders explained the importance of retaining tax revenues on tribal lands as a supplement to infrastructure and transportation funds.
- Tribal leaders want tribal tax issues to be a part of the larger national dialogue about tax reform.
- Tribal leaders seek a general welfare exclusion to shield tribal services to members and tribal businesses' revenue from taxation.
- Tribal leaders urged the Administration to endorse a policy addressing a specified list of law and regulations that reference the tax status of tribal businesses and operations.
- Tribal leaders cited the need for a legislative remedy to bond certification for tax-exempt bonds, as detailed in the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) recommendations.

### Tribal Relations with Government and Private Entities

- Tribal leaders pressed for federal consequences for state and local governments that fail to consult with tribes, citing some states' handling of federal transportation funds in particular.
- Tribal leaders voiced concerns about state and local officials using tribal land, and the land neighboring them, for mineral and resource exploration and urged such officials to instead partner with tribes in the developments.
- Tribal leaders seek a list of federal points of contact for entrepreneurs who are willing to invest in small businesses. A similar list for veterans to access benefits is also requested.
- Tribal leaders are concerned that small Indian-owned companies do not have a chance when competing for contracts against other larger established contractor firms. Tribal leaders impressed an obligation upon the federal government to develop fairer opportunities for small, and even larger, Indian-owned business.
- Tribal leaders cited the need to enter into self-governance compacts with National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation to provide services on public land.

### Infrastructure Development

- Tribal leaders cited the lack of access to broadband communication in rural areas. Such access is needed for both education and small-business marketing, something particularly critical for Tribal artists and craftspeople.
- Tribal leaders cited the disrepair of tribal lands' roads as a hurdle in attracting and building business. The current transportation bill concerns tribal leaders through potential risk of less funding for transportation in Indian Country.
- Tribal leaders described electricity in Indian Country as constantly unreliable and a consequential barrier to economic development.

## Energy Resource Development

- Tribal leaders introduced new ventures by tribes into solar and thermal energy development, including those entered in partnership with local and state governments as well as private entities.
- Tribal leaders seek federal grants to produce more renewable energy in rural Indian communities.
- Tribal leaders seek federal assistance in identifying banks that are interested in partnering with tribes in new energy ventures.
- Tribal leaders want to see energy development in Indian Country to happen on tribes' terms. Leaders do not want new green energy initiatives to mirror past fights over exportation of resources off of tribal lands.

## Carriers Fix

- Tribal leaders identified a *Carriers* fix as a top priority and a major hurdle to future economic development. Leaders urged the Administration to continue to push for an immediate fix.



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*Photo by Tami Heilemann*



## Securing Our Future: Cultural Protection, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection

**Lisa Jackson**, Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency

**Hilary Tompkins**, Solicitor, Department of the Interior

**Ignacia Moreno**, Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resource Division,  
Department of Justice

**Rachel Jacobson**, Acting Assistant Secretary for  
Fish and Wildlife and Parks, Department of the  
Interior

**Butch Blazer**, Deputy Under Secretary for Natural  
Resources, Department of Agriculture

**Deerin Babb-Brott**, Director, National Ocean  
Council Office

**David Huizenga**, Senior Advisor, Office of  
Environmental Management, Department of  
Energy

**Larry Roberts**, Principal Deputy Assistant  
Secretary, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Department of  
the Interior

**Jon Wellinghoff**, Chairman, Federal Energy  
Regulatory Commission



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Government to Government Relations

- Tribal leaders seek consistency with the Administration's pro-Indian policies throughout all agencies and their field offices.
- Tribal leaders stated their desire to partner with state and federal government to address issues but indicated the need for greater resources to allow tribal capacity building, particularly in addressing climate change.

- Tribal leaders noted the lack of participation from the Department of Defense (DOD) at the Tribal Nations Conference and asserted that DOD is often the most harmful of federal agencies with respect to tribal cultural and natural resources.
- Tribal leaders noted that some tribes have too little land for their needs and need the land-into-trust program to be streamlined to increase efficiencies.
- Tribal leaders have had trouble getting reimbursed by DOE through the Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant Program.
- Tribal leaders explained that tribes have to compete with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and others for some types of funding and asserted this is not consistent with the United States federal trust responsibilities to tribes under treaties that include environmental protection.
- Tribal leaders from the Arctic cited foreign ships on the Arctic Ocean landing along Alaska's north coast with no homeland security and an unprotected border posing a security risk.
- Tribal leaders indicated that data about water rights and water quantity needs to be more transparent and more widely shared.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior  
*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Cultural Protection

- Tribal leaders impressed that tribal cultures are tightly tied to a tribe's land, which provides a tribe with its resources and has significant cultural meaning. As a result, the consequences of global climate change are felt more immediately and more severely in Indian Country than in other areas.
- Tribal leaders indicated they remain very concerned about threats to sacred sites by various forms of economic activity and development, particularly mining.
- Tribal leaders stressed how important "first foods" are to a tribe and protecting the natural resources that produce them.
- Tribal leaders urged that San Francisco Peaks be deemed a cultural site so to enjoy a greater level of protection.
- Tribal leaders explained that the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) only provides for civil penalties and the profits made on some of the items were far greater than the statutory fines. The leaders advocated for criminal penalties for such cultural theft.

## BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

- Tribal leaders also advocated changing NAGPRA's rule respecting "culturally-identifiable funerary remains"—as such items need to be kept with the people.

### Natural Resource Protection

- Tribal leaders explained that natural resources are central to tribal culture and the tribal way of life, therefore increased threats to natural resources are perceived as an existential threat to the tribes themselves.
- Tribal leaders highlighted destruction of water resources as threats to tribal rights, such as hunting and fishing rights, particularly from mining.
- Tribal leaders noted the risks to the health of the Pacific Ocean, including from acidification.
- Tribal leaders from the Northwest noted the Puget Sound is poisoned and dying, which in turn imperils the recovery of the salmon on which the northwest Tribes rely and advocated federal resumption from states of responsibility for enforcing water protection statutes.
- Tribal leaders explained they see hatcheries vital to preservation of salmon populations, but National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association opposes fish hatcheries.

### Environmental Protection

- Tribal leaders expressed grave concerns over land swaps that would bring mining very close to the reservations, because despite not being on the reservations, the impacts are felt by tribes.
- Tribal leaders from the Arctic noted villages have 80 percent unemployment and complete dependence on subsistence hunting and fishing, but Alaska pipeline and roads curtail the caribou migration, making subsistence much more difficult and a proposed new pipeline for oil from the Chukchi Sea will make subsistence hunting and fishing nearly impossible.
- Tribal leaders feared the collapse of salmon fisheries in the Arctic Ocean due to new oil drilling developments and urged federal protection for remaining fisheries.

### *Carciari* Fix

- Tribal leaders said that a *Carciari* fix is the most important matter to tribes; the diminished ability to have land held in trust by the U.S. on its behalf assails the very foundations of tribal sovereignty.

## Building Healthy Communities, Excellence in Education and Native American Youth

**Dr. Yvette Roubideaux**, Director, Indian Health Service, Department of Health and Human Services

**Roberto Rodriguez**, Special Assistant to the President for Education,  
White House Domestic Policy Council

**George Sheldon**, Acting Assistant Secretary,  
Administration for Children and Families,  
Department of Health and Human Services

**Lillian Sparks**, Commissioner Administration for  
Native Americans, Administration for Children  
and Families, Department of Health and  
Human Services

**Janey Thornton**, Deputy Under-Secretary,  
Food Nutrition and Consumer Services,  
Department of Agriculture

**Brian Drapeaux**, Acting Director, Bureau of  
Indian Education, Department of the Interior

**Dot Harris**, Assistant Secretary for Economic  
Impact and Diversity, Department of Energy

**Bill Mendoza**, Executive Director, White House  
Initiative on American Indian and Alaska  
Native Education



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Budget Concerns

- Tribal leaders voiced concerns about the impacts of sequestration on Indian services and sought suggestions on what they could do to mitigate any impacts.
- Tribal leaders explained precisely how devastating the sequestration cuts would be to vital operations in Indian Country.
- Tribal leaders think tribal services funding, particularly for health and education, should not be considered discretionary or entitlement funding, and as a result, should be immune from any budget cuts.

## BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

- Tribal leaders of non-gaming tribes are worried about being able to cover any cuts to funding.
- Tribal leaders are particularly concerned about the underfunding of IHS facilities and the time it takes to get promised funding, given the lack of adequate healthcare on many reservations.
- Tribal leaders from rural communities point to the higher cost of reaching members as a source of disparate impact from potential budget cuts.



Photo courtesy of the Department of the Interior

*Photo by Tami Heilemann*

### Government to Government Relations

- Tribal leaders point to a lack of tribal involvement in budgeting processes as a cause for tribes being unable to effectively plan and provide services.
- Tribal leaders sometimes see far less funding than initially funded, particularly in hospitals and clinics.
- Tribal leaders want to engage with state leaders, in addition to federal leaders, to help mitigate any budget cuts. Tribal leaders do not want to be left in the dark when it comes to state budgeting processes.
- Tribal leaders would hope to see more consistency in making good on commitments to staff new facilities, particularly IHS hospitals and clinics.
- Tribal leaders would like to partner with local school districts and universities to discuss new ways to provide educational services for youth of the tribe.
- Tribal leaders need to be able to pull agency funding into single contracts. Currently, tribal leaders see reporting requirements as largest barrier to doing such and seek greater administrative flexibility and efficiency in complying with them.
- Tribal leaders pointed out that full contract support costs are mandated, but need greater agency participation in settling claims with tribes.
- Tribal leaders seek ability to handle their own Medicaid administration, particularly in states where governors refuse to comply with law out of political considerations. Tribal leaders expressed similar concern over local and state governments obstructing full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, particularly the Medicaid expansion provisions.

### Tribal leaders seek training of staff on Affordable Care Act implementation.

- Tribal leaders are concerned when money is directed to school districts or local governments; there is a lack of oversight to ensure funds are spent on services for Indian youth.
- Tribal leaders support the concept and implementation of Public Law 102-477.

## Cultural Concerns

- Tribal leaders want to be able to teach their youth the native languages, as a way to keep their culture alive. Tribal leaders seek reauthorization of the Esther Martinez Native Language Preservation Act to support such efforts.
- Tribal leaders would like to promote healthy traditional food in schools, both to keep youth healthy but also to keep culture alive.
- Tribal leaders are worried about the lack of parent involvement in youth programs and development.

## Education and Youth Development

- Tribal leaders reported that when Indian youth are sent off reservation for school they are too often expelled or suspended, making it difficult to put them back in school.
- Tribal leaders want more programs to help youth transition to adulthood and develop necessary life skills.
- Tribal leaders from rural communities seek broadband access to provide youth new opportunities through online education.
- Tribal leaders are frustrated with the difficulty in keeping permanent teachers in schools serving Indian youth.
- Tribal leaders do not want to see things like youth treatment centers to close or slow down operations, because they have been crucial to youth development.
- Tribal leaders from rural communities said their schools and hospitals have become inoperable because of the lack of staff.
- Tribal leaders sought support for development of alternative, healing courts to provide alternate paths for youth caught in the criminal justice system. Current systems are largely run by volunteers, because there is no funding.
- Tribal leaders see VAWA reauthorization as a crucial step in protecting many Indians' way of life and domestic tranquility.
- Tribal leaders seek support for quantitative research into the factors contributing to Native American students' high dropout rate as well as into strategies to support graduation.
- Tribal leaders identified an underrepresentation of tribal students in higher level STEM college and graduate programs.
- Tribal leaders urged continued funding for the IHS Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI), Methamphetamine Suicide Prevention Initiative, and Domestic Violence Prevention Initiative, as well as reauthorization of the SDPI. Further, tribal leaders cited need for further funding for substance abuse, early intervention, early detection of cancer and suicide prevention.



## Conclusion

President Obama is proud of the progress made in Indian Country during his first term. Many of the President and his Administration's accomplishments are outlined in the [2012 White House Tribal Nations Conference Progress Report](#). However, President Obama understands that progress must continue and remains committed to partnering with tribal communities in providing greater access to opportunities for Native Americans. As in his first term, President Obama approached his work with tribal communities through a strengthened government to government relationship built upon meaningful consultation and collaboration. In his address to the Conference this year, the President described the relationship "centered on self-determination and the right for tribal governments to do whatever you think is best to strengthen your communities." Through this relationship the President pledged to "keep working together to make sure that the promise of America is fully realized for every Native American."



Photo courtesy of The White House Photo Office

*Photo by Pete Souza*