



Forging a New and Better Future Together

2010 White House Tribal Nations Conference Progress Report

"I am absolutely committed to moving forward with you and forging a new and better future together. It's a commitment that's deeper than our unique nation-to-nation relationship. It's a commitment to getting this relationship right, so that you can be full partners in America's economy, and so your children and grandchildren can have an equal shot at pursuing the American dream." President Barack Obama

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Executive Summary

At the White House Tribal Nations Conference on November 5, 2009, President Obama, joined by Members of Congress, several cabinet secretaries and other senior administration officials from the Departments of State, Justice, Commerce, Education, Energy, Agriculture, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency met with leaders invited from all 564 federally recognized tribes to forge a stronger relationship with tribal governments. In doing so, the President took a major step toward fulfilling his promise to engage tribal leaders to ensure their voices are heard in Washington. “Washington can’t – and shouldn’t – dictate a policy agenda for Indian country,” the President told assembled tribal leaders and administration officials. “Tribal nations do better when they make their own decisions. That’s why we’re here today.” Acknowledging the history of marginalization of Indian people, of promises broken and treaties violated, and of failed Washington-knows-best solutions, President Obama called for a “new and better future,” a future in which tribal nations are full partners.



President Obama delivering opening remarks at the White House Tribal Nations Conference.
(Photo courtesy of White House Photo Office)

To ensure that future is realized, the President signed a memorandum at the conference, directing Federal agencies to submit detailed plans of actions on how they intend to secure regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials in the development of Federal policies that have tribal implications, as defined by Executive Order 13175. Agencies are currently in the process of implementing these plans. The Administration is also pursuing multi-agency collaborations with tribal governments to develop comprehensive policy initiatives to improve conditions in Indian country. These collaborative efforts build on numerous listening sessions conducted by Federal agencies and the White House over the past year and are consistent with the approach this Administration has taken to crafting Federal policy. The President has also appointed a number of Native Americans to high-level positions within his Administration to ensure tribal concerns are heard and acted upon.

As tribal leaders and administration officials at the conference expressed their visions for the future and identified the obstacles that must be overcome to reach their goals, the following needs and policy recommendations emerged:

❖ **Strengthening the Government-to-Government Relationship**

- **Engage in Meaningful Consultation**
- **Improve Management of Trust Resources**
- **Reform Land-into-Trust Process**

- **Review the U.S. Stance on the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples**

❖ **Health Care**

- **Permanent Authorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act**
- **Address the Suicide Crisis in Indian Country**
- **Provide Greater Access to Medical Screening and other Preventive Care**
- **Combat Childhood Obesity in Indian Country**
- **Resolve Radiation Exposure Claims**

❖ **Public Safety**

- **Support Tribal Justice Systems**
- **Combat Violence against Native Women**
- **Increase Federal Prosecutions of Crimes Committed in Indian Country**
- **Work with Tribal Leaders on Disaster Relief in Indian Country**

❖ **Education**

- **Increase Tribal Control over Indian Education**
- **Improve Indian Education and School Conditions**

❖ **Sustainable Economic Development**

- **Reduce Unemployment in Indian Country**
- **Support Infrastructure Development in Indian Country**
- **Assist in the Development of Clean Tribal Energy**
- **Facilitate Native American Access to Capital**

❖ **The Environment**

- **Address the Impact of Climate Change on Native People and Resources**
- **Address Environmental Degradation**
- **Improve Subsistence Programs**

❖ **Respect for Cultural Rights**

- **Support the Preservation of Native Languages**
- **Protect Sacred Sites and other Cultural Resources**
- **New Rule regarding Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation**

The President and the Administration are committed to working with tribal nations to implement the Indian policy agenda developed at the White House Tribal Nations Conference and to strengthening the partnership forged with tribal leaders.

Forging a New and Better Future Together

Last November at the White House Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama, Members of Congress, seven cabinet secretaries, and other senior administration officials met with tribal leaders invited from all 564 federally recognized Indian tribes to develop together the Administration’s Indian policy agenda. Tribal leaders had the opportunity to pose questions and voice their concerns to the President and senior administration officials during panels on education, health care, labor, economic development, the environment, energy, agriculture, public safety, and housing. The questions and comments from tribal leaders throughout the day as well as the over 200 comment cards submitted revealed the following overriding areas of concern:



The President listens to and answers questions from tribal leaders.
(Photo courtesy of the White House Photo Office)

- ❖ Strengthening the Government-to-Government Relationship
- ❖ Health Care
- ❖ Public Safety
- ❖ Education
- ❖ Sustainable Economic Development
- ❖ The Environment
- ❖ Respect for Cultural Rights

The Obama Administration is committed to working with tribal nations to address these issues. The President made clear that the conference—the largest and most widely attended gathering of tribal leaders to meet with an American President—was only the beginning of a “lasting conversation . . . crucial to our shared future,” and vowed that Indian people would not be forgotten by his Administration. Acknowledging the history of marginalization of Indian people, of promises broken and treaties violated, and of failed Washington-knows-best solutions, President Obama called for a “new and better future,” a future in which tribal nations are full partners.

To assist in making that future a reality, the President has appointed a number of Native Americans to high-level positions in the Administration, including Larry Echo Hawk of the Pawnee Nation as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs for the Department of the Interior, 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 Department of the Interior, Lillian Sparks of the Rosebud and Oglala Sioux Tribes as Commissioner of the Administration for Native Americans at the Department of Health and Human Services, Mary McNeil of the Winnebago Tribe as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights at the Department of

Agriculture, Kimberly Teehee of the Cherokee Nation as Senior Policy Advisor for Native American Affairs for the White House Domestic Policy Council, and Jodi Gillette of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe as Deputy Associate Director of the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Strengthening the Government-to-Government Relationship

President Obama respects tribal sovereignty and is committed to a new era in the government-to-government relationship. “Washington can’t – and shouldn’t – dictate a policy agenda for Indian country,” the President told assembled tribal leaders and administration officials. “Tribal nations do better when they make their own decisions. That’s why we’re here today.” Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar reiterated the President’s statements, pledging meaningful consultation and continued engagement with tribal governments to further the shared goal of a safe, strong, healthy and more prosperous Indian people for the future. Tribal leaders at the conference praised the President’s commitment and provided a number of ways through which the Federal Government could demonstrate that commitment, including engaging in meaningful consultation, improving management of trust resources, reforming the land-into-trust process, and reviewing its position on the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Engage in Meaningful Consultation

Administration officials and tribal leaders pledged to work together to engage in meaningful consultation that respects the sovereignty of tribes and the right of tribes to self-governance. This pledge was memorialized by a Presidential memorandum signed at the conference directing



(Photo courtesy of the White House Photo Office)

Federal agencies to submit detailed plans of actions on how they intend to secure regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with tribal officials in the development of Federal policies that have tribal implications, pursuant to Executive Order 13175. Agencies are currently in the process of implementing these plans.

Additionally, the Administration is pursuing multi-agency collaborations with tribal governments to develop comprehensive policy for Indian Country. These collaborative efforts will build on numerous listening sessions conducted by the agencies. The Administration is also committed to holding regular listening sessions at the White House and has already held sessions attended by senior White House staff and relevant agency officials on health care, energy, job creation, education, and consultation. Such an all-inclusive and determined effort is a marked contrast to the past and will serve as the foundation for a new era in U.S.-tribal relations.

Improve Management of Trust Resources

At the conference, tribal leaders stressed the need to improve the management of resources held in trust by the Federal Government. Just over one month later, on December 8, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Attorney General Eric Holder announced the settlement of *Cobell v. Salazar*. The proposed settlement agreement provides \$1.4 billion to class members as redress for trust mismanagement and accounting claims and sets aside an additional \$2 billion for the purchase and consolidation of fractionated Indian land and other trust related reform. As much as \$60 million of the \$2 billion will be made available to support a higher education scholarship fund to benefit Native Americans. The Administration is working hard to ensure the settlement is approved by Congress.

Reform Land-into-Trust Process

Tribal leaders expressed significant concern over the Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Carcieri v. Salazar*, which held that under the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 the Federal Government cannot take land into trust for Indian Tribes not under Federal jurisdiction in 1934, and urged the Administration to formulate a comprehensive response to the decision. The White House understands the concerns of the tribes and fully supports the "Carcieri fix" proposed by Senator Dorgan and endorsed by tribal leaders that would make clear the Secretary of the Interior's authority to take land into trust for all currently recognized tribes.

Review the U.S. Stance on the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

During the conference, tribal leaders recommended that President Obama reexamine the U.S. position on the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We welcomed the dialogue with tribal officials, and at the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, announced that the United States will undertake a formal review of its position on the Declaration in consultation with Indian tribes and with the input of interested nongovernmental organizations. This decision builds on listening sessions on human rights held in March in New Mexico and in Navajo Nation that were attended by officials from multiple Federal agencies in preparation for the U.N. Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review of the United States.

Health Care

The Obama Administration is committed to improving health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives, as evidenced by the 13% increase in funding for the Indian Health Service (IHS) in FY 2010 and the 9% additional increase for IHS proposed in the President's FY 2011 Budget Request. These increases are on top of \$500 million provided to the IHS under the Recovery Act. Even more significantly, President Obama proudly signed into law the Affordable Care Act that will improve the quality of health care and make it more accessible and affordable for all Americans, including our First Americans. The Affordable Care Act also includes the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA), which authorizes new and expanded programs and services within the IHS.

Permanent Authorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act

In August, 2009, the White House hosted a listening session on Indian health care, at which tribal leaders urged the Administration to formulate a comprehensive approach to Indian health care reform. Three months later, at the Tribal Nations Conference, tribal leaders again made clear that health reform is important to Indians and specifically requested that the IHCIA be made permanent. That is why the Administration supported permanent reauthorization of the IHCIA as part of the health insurance reform legislation signed by President Obama in March. The permanent authorization will eliminate the need for tribal leaders and Indian organizations to lobby Congress every few years for programs that are critical to the well-being of nearly two million Americans, including hundreds of thousands of children. Additionally, the health reform legislation:

- Expands authorization for American Indians and Alaska Natives' access to long-term care, including home and community based services, assisted living services, and hospice care;
- Authorizes mental and other behavioral health programs for Indian country, including a new comprehensive youth suicide prevention effort;
- Establishes new diabetes monitoring services and authorizes the IHS to provide dialysis services for the first time; and
- Reauthorizes existing and creates new Indian health care facility construction programs.

The legislation also addresses concerns voiced by tribal leaders at listening sessions by exempting American Indians and Alaska Natives from financial penalties for choosing not to purchase health coverage and by excluding qualified Indian health benefits from an individual's gross income. These exemptions are consistent with the long-standing commitment of the Federal Government to provide health services to First Americans.

Address the Suicide Crisis in Indian Country

The suicide rate among American Indians and Alaska Natives is 1.9 times the national rate and is the highest rate of any population group in the United States. The Administration takes this problem seriously. Accordingly, the health care legislation signed by the President authorizes mental and other behavioral health programs for Indian country, including new authorities to address youth suicide.

Provide Greater Access to Medical Screening and other Preventive Care

Tribal leaders highlighted a need for a more coordinated approach to prevent chronic conditions, such as diabetes, that disproportionately impact Native Americans. Accordingly, provisions of the IHCIA, permanently authorized as part of the Affordable Care Act, establish new diabetes monitoring services and authorize the IHS to provide dialysis services for the first time.

Combat Childhood Obesity in Indian Country

This past February, the First Lady unveiled a nationwide campaign – *Let's Move!* – to fight the epidemic of childhood obesity and improve the health of children. An integral part of the First Lady's campaign will be to address the needs of populations where childhood obesity rates are particularly high, like American Indian and Alaska Native communities. In support of the First Lady's campaign, President Obama signed a Presidential memorandum establishing an inter-agency task force that conducted a review of every program and policy relating to child nutrition and physical activity and developed a national action plan that maximizes Federal resources and sets concrete benchmarks toward the First Lady's national goals. The task force considered tribal input on how childhood obesity solutions will be effective in American Indian and Alaska Native communities.

Additionally, the President's FY 2011 Budget Request would provide \$1.5 million to IHS to prevent and treat childhood obesity in AI/AN communities. \$1.25 million would go to pilot test and evaluate an intervention by pediatricians and primary care teams in medical office and school-based health center settings to promote early identification and treatment through a systematic overweight screening process, in-depth medical assessments, counseling, appropriate follow-ups and referrals, patient education, and staff training. The remaining \$250,000 would be used to create the Indian Health System Healthy Weight for Life Workgroup to facilitate marketing, implementation, and evaluation of the Healthy Weight for Life Strategy, which provides individuals, parents, schools, tribal organizations, Indian health care delivery system providers, and IHS leadership and staff with guidance for taking action to promote healthy weight.

In addition to funding new initiatives, the Administration is committed to promoting health among the youth in Indian communities. The Administration supports programs such as the Special Diabetes Program for Indians (SDPI) and Cherokee Choices, which have proven successful in the fight against childhood obesity and type-2 diabetes in children. SDPI provides weight management programs for youth, gestational diabetes programs to help reduce *in utero* exposure to elevated blood sugar levels, and other public awareness campaigns and interventions to promote healthy behaviors among AI/AN youth. Cherokee Choices, a community-based intervention supported by grant funds provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, focuses on the prevention of type-2 diabetes, particularly in children, on a more local level and includes elementary school mentoring, worksite wellness for adults, and church-based health promotion.

Resolve Radiation Exposure Claims

On March 8, 2010, as part of the Attorney General's commitment to strengthening the government-to-government relationship with Indian tribes, Assistant Attorney General West announced a new internship program that will employ students part-time in the Four Corners region (Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona) to reach out to Native Americans and the families of Native Americans whose work in the uranium industry during the Cold War benefited the United States but exposed them to radiation and may entitle them to compensation under the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. The outreach is intended to assist Native American

claimants that may encounter difficulty submitting a successful claim due to Native American culture, tradition, and customs.

Public Safety

On January 11, 2010, Attorney General Holder announced sweeping reforms to enhance public safety on Indian reservations. The Attorney General directed all U.S. Attorneys offices with districts containing Indian tribes to hold annual consultations with the tribes to develop operational plans addressing public safety in Indian country, to work closely with Indian law enforcement, and to pay particular attention to violence against women. In addition to agency reforms, the Administration supports the Senate version of the Tribal Law and Order Act of 2009, which would allow for increased coordination and communication among Federal, tribal, state, and local law enforcement agencies and would make tribal governments better able to provide public safety in their communities. The Administration is committed to working with the tribes on a government-to-government basis to increase public safety in Indian country.

Support Tribal Justice Systems

During the conference, tribal leaders described their struggle to provide adequate law enforcement with limited resources. Chairman Murphy of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe explained that on his reservation seven officers patrol an area the size of Connecticut; at night there may be as few as two officers on patrol.



(Photo courtesy of the White House Photo Office)

The Administration understands the need for additional support for law enforcement in Indian country and accordingly the President's FY 2011 Budget Request provides \$321 million to DOJ for tribal public safety initiatives, an increase of 42% over FY 2010. This includes \$255.6 million for grants to Indian tribes for tribal law enforcement efforts. The FY 2011 Budget Request also sustains FY 2010 appropriations increases of over 21% for BIA funded public safety and law enforcement efforts and includes an additional \$19 million to support 81 new FBI positions (45 agents) to investigate violent crimes in Indian country. These increases build on over \$250 million in Recovery Act funds made available to tribes in FY 2009 to address criminal justice needs.

Funding increases are being complimented by additional Federal training of tribal law enforcement officers. This past May in Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center presented its first Indian Country Law Enforcement Training Symposium. The symposium was preceded by a Training Needs Assessment Focus Group attended by tribal representatives and police chiefs to inform officials of the unique law enforcement training needs of Indian country.

Combat Violence against Native Women

A disproportionately high number of Native American women are raped during their lifetimes. President Obama made clear that this “shocking and contemptible fact” is an “assault on our national conscience” that cannot be ignored any longer. Accordingly, DOJ has made combating violence against women in tribal communities a priority and will provide training and resources to enhance the investigation and prosecution of crimes against Native women. At the suggestion of tribal leaders, the Justice Department will create a new Federal-tribal task force to develop strategies and guidance for Federal and tribal prosecutions of violent crimes against women in tribal communities. Additionally, the Justice Department is expanding the annual tribal consultation required by the Violence against Women Act of 2005 to ensure more robust Justice Department and interagency engagement on this critical issue.

Increase Federal Prosecutions of Crimes Committed in Indian Country

In response to tribal concerns over high prosecution declination rates in Indian country, DOJ is adding 33 new Indian Country Assistant United States Attorneys in FY 2010 to increase prosecution of serious crime in Indian country. Three of these new Assistant United States Attorneys will participate in a Community Prosecution Pilot project, which will allow the United States Attorney’s Office to partner with tribal stakeholders to develop reservation-specific responses to crime and prevention issues. The Justice Department also will add 24 new victim-witness specialists in FY 2010 to provide critical support services for victims in Indian country. These new resources will make the Federal justice system more responsive to Indian country.

Work with Tribal Leaders on Disaster Relief in Indian Country

Tribal leaders expressed a desire to work more closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in responding to disasters that affect tribal members and lands. In response, White House staff met with FEMA to discuss Federal major disaster and emergency declarations in relation to Indian country. Additionally, FEMA Administrator Fugate has conducted listening sessions and has committed to reviewing all existing Agency policies and programs to ensure tribal concerns are addressed. Administrator Fugate has also directed FEMA’s National Tribal Liaison to review and revise FEMA’s existing Tribal Policy. The revised policy will include an implementation plan for consultation, outreach, and program development.

Education

President Obama understands the need for a fresh and innovative approach to education. Throughout the conference, tribal leaders expressed concern over the lack of educational opportunities available to Indian children. The Administration is now reviewing the many policy recommendations proposed by conference attendees.

Increase Tribal Control over Indian Education

The Administration recognizes the importance of enhancing the role of tribes in Indian education and supports greater flexibility in the use of Federal education funds to meet the needs of Indian students, including allowing funding for Native language immersion and Native language restoration programs. The Administration also supports strengthening the role of Tribal Education Departments in coordinating and implementing services and programs for Indian students within their jurisdictions. Recently, the Department of Education held four regional consultations with tribal officials regarding reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Administration will continue to consult with tribal governments on Indian education, as it did throughout the process of selecting Keith Moore of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe as the new Director of the Bureau of Indian Education.

Improve Indian Education and School Conditions

Although the Recovery Act invested \$170.5 million in Indian education at the Department of Education and \$277 million in Indian school construction at the Department of the Interior, the Administration responded to tribal leaders' calls for additional resources by supporting the inclusion of \$300 million for Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities, \$50 million for Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions, \$150 million for Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, and \$50 million for Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions over the next ten years. These investments will be made as part of the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act in order to renew, reform, and expand programming so that students at these institutions are given every chance to live up to their full potential.

Sustainable Economic Development

Reduce Unemployment in Indian Country

The President's FY 2011 Budget Request includes \$55 million, representing a 4% increase over FY 2010 funding, for the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration's Indian and Native American Program, which grants funding to tribes and Native American non-profits to provide employment and training services to unemployed and low-income Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians. Additionally, the Recovery Act allocated over \$17 million for the Native American Supplemental Youth Service Program to support summer employment and training opportunities for disconnected youths and veterans.



Panelists answered a broad range of questions. From left to right: Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke. (Photo credit: Tami A. Heilemann-DOI)

Support Infrastructure Development in Indian Country

Tribal leaders cited the inadequacy of infrastructure as one of the primary obstacles to economic development on Indian reservations. They explained that tribes lack access to high-speed internet, adequate housing and other basic infrastructure necessary for their communities to attract outside investment. In order to address these problems, the Recovery Act allocated \$510 million to the Department of Housing and Urban Development for the Native American Housing Block Grant program for new housing construction, acquisition, rehabilitation, and infrastructure development, \$310 million to the Department of Transportation for the Indian Reservation Roads Program, and over \$142 million to the Bureau of Indian Affairs for roads maintenance. Additionally, the Department of Commerce received \$4.7 billion to increase access to broadband services in underserved areas of the country.

These funds have been awarded to several projects benefiting Indian country. Most recently, a \$32 million grant was awarded to bring high-speed, affordable broadband to the Navajo Nation. The Department of Agriculture also received Recovery Act funds to expand broadband access and recently awarded \$20.3 million to the Coeur D'Alene Tribe, the Tohono O'odham Nation and the Pueblo de San Ildefonso to improve broadband access. In addition to broadband investments, the Department of Agriculture's Rural Development has made \$108.4 million in Recovery Act investments benefiting AI/AN populations, including \$24.7 million for community water and wastewater infrastructure, \$15.3 million for community facilities, and \$68.4 million for single family housing (585 home loans).

Assist in the Development of Clean Tribal Energy

The Administration, in consultation with the tribes, is committed to developing and investing in clean energy in Indian country. Prior to the Tribal Nations Conference, the White House hosted



Secretary Salazar facilitates questions from the audience to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson and Secretary of Energy Steven Chu.

(Photo credit: Tami A. Heilemann-DOI)

a listening session on energy development in Indian country, where tribal leaders identified a variety of obstacles to Indian energy development. Subsequently, nine Federal agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding to streamline the process to build transmission lines on Federal lands. The goals of this agreement are to break down bureaucratic barriers that currently make it slow and costly to build new transmission lines on Federal lands, reduce expense and uncertainty in the process, generate cost savings, increase accessibility to renewable energy, and jumpstart job creation.

Additionally, under the Recovery Act, tribes have received over \$54 million through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program to assist the development and implementation of a comprehensive energy efficiency strategy. Tribes have also received over \$10 million to weatherize low income homes under the Weatherization Assistance Program, and the Navajo

Nation was awarded \$5 million to develop “smart grid” technologies and \$1 million to train workers to modernize and transform energy infrastructure on tribal lands.

Increase Native American Access to Capital

Two billion dollars in Tribal Economic Development Bonds were allocated under the Recovery Act. The interest on these bonds is tax exempt, lowering the cost of financing tribal investment projects. Through the Recovery Act, additional funds were made available to guarantee over \$100 million in loans to spur job creation in tribal communities.

The Environment

Address Environmental Policies

During 2009 – 2010, the Council on Environmental Quality held stakeholder and regional meetings with tribes and Alaskan Natives in connection with the Ocean Policy Task Force’s first report on ocean policy, governance and priorities and its second report on coastal and marine spatial planning. During the course of the past year, CEQ has met with tribes to exchange information such as issues impacting the Arctic, climate change mitigation and adaptation, rivers and watersheds, fisheries, subsistence consumption of fish and wildlife, and proximity to waste disposal facilities.

Address the Impact of Climate Change on Native People and Resources

President Obama understands that tribal nations depend on the health of the environment for subsistence fishing, hunting, and gathering. The Administration is committed to consulting with tribes on environmental issues, particularly with respect to the impact of climate change on Native Americans and their lands.

Address Environmental Degradation

At the conference, President Obama made clear that preventing environmental degradation is a top priority of his Administration. He explained that the Environmental Protection Agency would look to consult and coordinate with tribes on environmental management and remediation. Additionally, the President’s FY 2011 Budget Request would increase the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program, which provides grants to recognized tribes and tribal consortia for establishing environmental protection programs in Indian country, by over 13%. The President’s budget would also initiate a new \$30 million multimedia tribal grant program to further environmental improvements in Indian country.

Improve Subsistence Programs

Under the Recovery Act, the Forest Service released \$211 million to benefit tribes and tribal lands, including \$28.2 million for wildland fire management, improving habitat and watersheds that support rural subsistence, and capital improvements. Additionally, the Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service has invested more than \$5 million in Recovery Act

funds to improve facilities and purchase equipment in support of the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations to ensure the safe storage and distribution of food.

Respect for Cultural Rights

Support the Preservation of Native Languages

A number of conference participants asked for greater funding for native language education and preservation. The Administration supports native language education and the FY 2010 Budget provides the Administration of Native Americans with \$12 million specifically for native language projects.

Protect Sacred Sites and other Cultural Resources

President Obama supports the protection of sacred sites and cultural traditions, including native ancestors' burial grounds and churches. Accordingly, the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Attorneys' offices will continue to aggressively pursue individuals that desecrate sacred sites.

New Rule regarding Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation

Additionally, after years of consultation with tribes, the Department of the Interior released a new rule, effective May 14, 2010, that requires museums and Federal agencies listing Native American human remains in their collections as unidentifiable to consult with tribes that historically lived in the area where the remains were exhumed in an attempt to culturally identify the remains so that they can be repatriated. For those remains that cannot be culturally identified, the tribe from whose land the remains were recovered has first priority of claim. The second priority of claim goes to the tribe whose aboriginal land comprised the area of exhumation.



Secretary Salazar greets Joe Medicine Crow, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Obama on August 12, 2009.

(Photo credit: Tami A. Heilemann-DOI)



(Photo courtesy of the White House Photo Office)

Conclusion

President Obama was honored to host the White House Tribal Nations Conference, the first of many dialogues he believes will bring about a new and better future for all AI/AN people. The President believes that we are moving in the right direction but understands that our work is far from done. As the President said in his opening remarks at the conference, the Administration will look to the wisdom and experience of tribal leaders to set the agenda and propose the solutions that best address the significant challenges facing tribal communities. We will continue to work with tribal nations to address health disparities, provide a sound education for Indian children, ensure that Native people enjoy a safe community free from the impending peril of violent crime, and establish a foundation for sound and sustainable economic development in Indian country. The President is committed to bringing hope and a new era of prosperity to Indian country and looks forward to working together with tribal leaders to achieve those ends.