

President Obama Meets with Tribal Leaders

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On December 2, 2011, following the [2011 White House Tribal Nations Conference](#), President Obama met with a small and regionally diverse group of tribal leaders from across Indian Country. Also participating in the meeting were Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar, Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and Associate Attorney General Thomas Perrelli.

The tribal leaders in attendance had the opportunity to directly engage with the President on a leader-to-leader, government-to-government basis. They spoke about economic issues affecting their reservations and proposed some innovative solutions for developing sustainable economies focusing on building solar and wind projects, reducing regulatory burdens, expanding broadband and leveraging private sector investment, among others. Also discussed was the [Executive Order](#) on Improving American Indian and Alaska Native Educational Opportunities and Strengthening Tribal Colleges and Universities, which the President signed earlier in the day to improve education opportunities for Native American youth across the country.

The twelve tribal leaders that participated in the meeting were Fawn Sharpe, President, Quinault Indian Nation; Diane Enos, President, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community; Steve Ortiz, Chairman, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation; Jefferson Keel, Lt. Governor, Chickasaw Nation; Nelson Cordova, Governor, Pueblo of Taos; George Edwardson, President, Inupiat Community of Arctic Slope; Ben Shelly, President, Navajo Nation; Richard Milanovich, Chairman, Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians; Colley Billie, Chairman, Miccosukee Indian Tribe; Tracy “Ching” King, President, Fort Belknap Indian Community; Rodney Bordeaux, President, Rosebud Sioux Tribe; and Erma Vizenor, Chairwoman, White Earth Band of Chippewa.

This meeting took place after a week of White House events that focused on strengthening the government-to-government relationship between the United States and Tribal Nations and building on the progress made during the 2009 and 2010 White House Tribal Nations Conferences. In addition to the President’s meeting, the White House hosted a series of Regional briefings and listening sessions for tribal leaders, highlighted 11 Native American youth as [Champions of Change](#), released a [White House Tribal Nations Conference Progress Report](#) and at the Tribal Nations Conference the President [spoke](#) to representatives from the 565 federally recognized Indian tribes.

On Friday, before his remarks at the Tribal Nations Conference, President Obama signed an [Executive Order](#) that establishes The White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Native Education. The Initiative will help expand educational opportunities and improve educational outcomes for all American Indian and Alaska Native students, including opportunities to learn their Native languages, cultures, and histories and receive a complete and competitive education that prepares them for college and a career and productive and satisfying lives. The Initiative is also committed to strengthening tribal colleges and universities. Education

Secretary Arne Duncan and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar will work closely together to implement the Order.

This Executive Order and last week's events build on the Administrations [ongoing efforts](#) to improve economic conditions in Indian Country. For example, additional federal agency announcements from last week include:

- **The Department of Energy (DOE) Announced Technical Assistance Opportunities for Tribal Clean Energy Deployment:** DOE launched the [Strategic Technical Assistance Response Team \(START\) initiative](#) aimed at advancing clean energy generation in Indian Country and providing federally recognized Native American and Alaska Native governments with technical assistance to accelerate clean energy project deployment. This effort furthers the Administration and Department's commitment to provide tribes with the tools and resources they need to foster tribal energy self-sufficiency and sustainability, advancing economic competitiveness and job creation.
- **The Department of the Interior (DOI) Announced Significant Leasing Reform to Spur Commercial, Residential and Renewable Energy Development on Indian Lands:** DOI announced a [sweeping reform of federal surface leasing regulations](#) for American Indian lands that will streamline the approval process for home ownership, expedite economic development and spur renewable energy development in Indian Country. The proposed rule would modify regulations governing the Bureau of Indian Affairs' process for approving the lease of surface acres on lands the federal government holds in trust for tribes and individuals. As trustee, Interior is responsible for managing approximately 56 million surface acres in Indian Country.
- **Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar Named Members to the [National Commission on Indian Trust Administration and Reform](#):** As part of President Obama's commitment to fulfilling this nation's trust responsibilities to Native Americans, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar named five prominent tribal leaders to a national commission that will undertake a forward-looking, comprehensive evaluation of Interior's trust management of nearly \$4 billion in Native American trust funds.
- **The Department of Transportation (DOT) Announced \$15 Million to Improve Transit Options on Tribal Lands:** DOT announced [\\$15 million in grants](#) to help rural American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments invest in public transit to improve access to employment centers and promote economic development on tribal lands. The grants are awarded under the Federal Transit Administration's Tribal Transit Program.

The Tribal Nations Conference and the events surrounding it are the cornerstone of the Administration's outreach and engagement with tribal governments and the lessons and input from this past week will help shape federal policy in the weeks, months and years to come.

We would like to thank all tribal leaders for taking part in the White House events and look forward to our continued collaboration and dialogue.

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