

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at the Opening of the American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations Conference and a Discussion With Tribal Leaders

November 5, 2009

The President. Thank you. Please, everybody, have a seat. Thank you to Jefferson Keel, thanks for the wonderful introduction; to Clarence Jackson for the invocation. Good morning to all of you. I am honored to be with you today at this unique and historic event, the largest and most widely attended gathering of tribal leaders in our history. And I am so grateful to many Members of Congress who could join us today, along with several members of my Cabinet who will be participating in this conference today.

You know, a couple of summers ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Crow Nation in Montana. And while I was there, I was adopted into the nation by a wonderful couple, Hartford and Mary Black Eagle. And I know what they're saying now: "Kids grow up so fast." [*Laughter*] Only in America could the adoptive son of Crow Indians grow up to become President of the United States.

It's now been a year since the American people went to the polls and gave me this extraordinary privilege and responsibility. And part of what accounts for the hope people felt on that day, I think, was a sense that we had an opportunity to change the way Washington worked, a chance to make our Federal Government the servant not of special interests, but of the American people. It was a sense that we had an opportunity to bring about meaningful change for those who had for too long been excluded from the American Dream.

And few have been more marginalized and ignored by Washington for as long as Native Americans, our first Americans. We know the history that we share. It's a history marked by violence and disease and deprivation. Treaties were violated; promises were broken. You were told your lands, your religion, your cultures, your languages were not yours to keep. And that's a history that we've got to acknowledge if we are to move forward.

We also know our more recent history, one in which too often, Washington thought it knew what was best for you. There was too little consultation between governments. And that's a major reason why things are the way they are today. Some of your reservations face unemployment rates of up to 80 percent. Roughly a quarter of all Native Americans live in poverty. More than 14 percent of all reservation homes don't have electricity, and 12 percent don't have access to a safe water supply. In some reservations as many as 20 people live together just to get by. Without real communication and consultation, we're stuck year after year with policies that don't work on issues specific to you and on broader issues that affect all of us. And you deserve to have a voice in both.

I know that you may be skeptical that this time will be any different. And you have every right to be, and nobody would have blamed you if you didn't come today, but you did. And I know what an extraordinary leap of faith that is on your part.

And that's why I want you to know that I'm 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 the American economy and so your children and your grandchildren can have a equal shot at pursuing the American Dream. And that begins by fulfilling the promises I made to you during my campaign.

I promised you a voice on my senior staff in the White House so that you'd have a seat at the table when important decisions are being made about your lives, your nations, and your people. And that's why I appointed Kimberly Teehee of the Cherokee Nation as my Native American policy adviser and Jodi Gillette of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to work directly with all of you. That's why Secretary Salazar and I selected Larry EchoHawk of the Pawnee Nation to serve as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs here at Interior. And they are doing great work so far.

I also told you that we'd shake up the bureaucracy and get policymakers out of Washington so they could hear directly from you about your hopes, your dreams, and the obstacles that keep you from pursuing them. Secretary Salazar in particular has helped lead a comprehensive outreach to tribal communities, and Attorney General Eric Holder, Energy Secretary Steven Chu, HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, along with several members of my staff, have held listening sessions on American Indian and Alaska Native issues around the country and at the White House.

I promised you we'd host this conference to develop an agenda that works for your communities, because I believe Washington can't—and shouldn't—dictate a policy agenda for Indian Country. Tribal nations do better when they make their own decisions. That's why we're here today.

And I want to be clear about this: Today's summit is not lip service. We're not going to go through the motions and pay tribute to one another, and then furl up the flags and go our separate ways. Today's sessions are part of a lasting conversation that's crucial to our shared future.

Now, Secretary Salazar and Assistant Secretary EchoHawk are among the best advocates you could have in Washington, and this Department is doing fantastic work under their leadership. But being good partners with tribal nations is a responsibility we've all got to take on. And that's why representatives of multiple agencies are here today, because if we're going to address the needs of Native Americans in a comprehensive way, then we've got to mount a comprehensive response.

A major step toward living up to that responsibility is the Presidential memorandum that I'll be signing at this desk in just a few moments. In the final years of his administration, President Clinton issued an Executive order establishing regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration between your nations and the Federal Government. But over the past 9 years, only a few agencies have made an effort to implement that Executive order, and it's time for that to change.

So the memorandum I'll sign directs every Cabinet agency to give me a detailed plan within 90 days of how—the full implementation of that Executive order and how we're going to improve tribal consultation. After all, there are challenges we can only solve by working together, and we face a serious set of issues right now.

We face our economic crisis, in which we took bold and swift action, including in your communities. We allocated more than \$3 billion of the Recovery Act to help with some of your most pressing needs, like rebuilding and renovating schools on reservations across the country.

We provided more than \$100 million in loans to spur job creation in tribal economies. And we made sure my budget included significant increases in funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian Health Service, and other agencies that have critical roles to play in your communities.

But if we're going to bring real and lasting change for Native Americans, we need a comprehensive strategy, as I said before. Part of that strategy is health care. We know that as long as Native Americans die of illnesses like tuberculosis, alcoholism, diabetes, pneumonia, and influenza at far higher rates than the rest of the population, then we're going to have to do more to address disparities in health care delivery.

More than half of all Native Americans and Alaska Natives, especially those in remote areas with limited access to care, rely on the Indian Health Service for their most basic needs. And that's why we invested \$500 million under the Recovery Act in strengthening and modernizing the IHS, and that's why my budget proposes a increase of 13 percent in IHS funding.

We're also closer than ever to passing health insurance reform that will finally make quality insurance affordable to all Americans who don't have coverage and finally offer stability and security to Americans who do, and that includes our first Americans.

When it comes to creating jobs, closing the opportunity gap, and leaving something better for our future generations, few areas hold as much promise as clean energy. Up to 15 percent of our potential wind energy resources are on Native American land, and the potential for solar energy is even higher. But too often, you face unique hurdles to developing these renewable resources. And that's why I'm very proud—under Secretary Salazar's leadership, we're looking for new opportunities to ensure that you have a say in planning for access to the transmission grid. We're streamlining and expediting the permit process for energy development and transmission across tribal lands. We are securing tribal access to financing and investments for new energy projects. And thanks to the Recovery Act, we've established an energy auditor training program that could prepare Native Americans for the green jobs of the future. And that's going to be absolutely important.

But the future of Indian Country rests on something more: the education we provide our children. We know that Native Americans face some of the lowest matriculation rates and highest high school and college dropout rates. And that's why the Recovery Act also included \$170 million for Indian education and \$277 million for Indian school construction. And that's why my budget provided \$50 million in advanced funding for tribal colleges that are often economic lifelines for a community. Students who study at a tribal college are eight times less likely to drop out of higher education, they continue on to a 4-year institution at a higher rate than students in community colleges, and nearly 80 percent end up in careers that help their tribal nation.

And none of our efforts will take root if we can't even guarantee that our communities are safe: safe places to learn, safe places to grow, safe places to thrive. And on some reservations, violent crime is more than 20 times the national average. The shocking and contemptible fact that one in three Native American women will be raped in their lifetimes is an assault on our national conscience that we can no longer ignore.

So tribes need support in strengthening their law enforcement capability. They need better resources and more training. And my administration fully appreciates the complexity and challenges you face when it comes to the criminal justice system on tribal lands. And we

need to have a serious conversation with regard to all aspects of your public safety, and that's a conversation my administration is committed to doing.

So this is a challenge we take very seriously. The Department of Justice, the Department of the Interior, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services are all working on ways to empower tribal governments to ensure greater safety in their own communities, and I want to particularly commend Attorney General Eric Holder for his efforts on this so far. I also strongly support the Tribal Law and Order Act, and I thank Chairman Dorgan and Representative Herseth Sandlin for their leadership on this issue. And I look forward to Congress passing it so I can sign it into law.

So there's a lot of work to be done today. But before we get at it, I want to close with this. I know you've heard this song from Washington before. I know you've often heard grand promises that sound good but rarely materialize. And each time, you're told this time will be different. But over the last few years, I've had a chance to speak with Native American leaders across the country about the challenges you face, and those conversations have been deeply important to me.

I get it. I'm on your side. I understand what it means to be an outsider. I was born to a teenage mother. My father left when I was 2 years old, leaving her—my mother and my grandparents to raise me. We didn't have much. We moved around a lot. So even though our experiences are different, I understand what it means to be on the outside looking in. I know what it means to feel ignored and forgotten and what it means to struggle. So you will not be forgotten as long as I'm in this White House. All right. Thank you.

Together—working together, we're going to make sure that the first Americans, along with all Americans, get the opportunities they deserve. So with that, if I'm not mistaken, I am in a position now to start signing this memorandum, and then we're going to do a little Q&A. So get everything set up. How many pens do you want me to use?

White House staff member. Eight.

Eight pens—[*laughter*]—I don't know who's getting the pens, but—

[*At this point, the President signed the memorandum.*]

The President. This is harder than it looks. [*Laughter*] There you go. Done.

Thank you. All right, I think that we've got some time for questions and answers. If you've got the questions, then if I don't have the answers, somebody here does. [*Laughter*] So—

Audience member. Are you coming to Alaska?

The President. We're—hold it. We're—no shouting now. [*Laughter*] But I would love to come to Alaska, absolutely.

So everybody have a seat, and Jefferson, how are we working this? Do you get the first question?

Jefferson Keel. Yes, sir, Mr. President.

The President. He's got—he's a big cheese, so he gets the first question. [*Laughter*] Go ahead.

Federal-Tribal Relations

Mr. Keel. Thank you, Mr. President. First of all, I want to thank you for honoring your commitments that you've made to restore the Federal Government's trust, responsibility, and the important relationship between Indian nations and the United States.

We've seen you honor your commitments in the appointments you've made to the many Native American people serving in your administration; we certainly appreciate that. But also, we've seen improvements in the budgets for Indian programs, and we're certainly appreciative of that.

As the president of the National Congress of American Indians, I've been asked to make a request on the fundamental issues. Tribes across the country strongly support the creation of the Executive order you just mentioned, and we're certainly proud of that, reaffirming the inherent sovereign status of our nations and renewing the pledge to honor the treaties and to trust responsibility. We particularly hope for the establishment of real mechanisms for accountability, not only for this administration but set a path for the future.

We request that you address the issues of Indian lands and the trust responsibility. We need to restore tribal lands that have been taken away. We need to change the management that exists on existing tribal lands. There's so much potential for economic development. We ask that the Federal Government become a partner in that journey. We particularly thank you for the administration's support for the Carcieri solution.

And finally, Mr. President, we know that you've made significant pledges and commitments to Indian country, and we want to honor you by saying thank you for those commitments. But more than that, we respect you as a man of your word. You've restored hope to the Indian communities, and we want to thank you for restoring that, not only just by your words, but by your actions. Thank you again, Mr. President.

The President. I appreciate that. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Okay, who's next? There are mikes in there, so—please introduce yourself, by the way to the——

Federal-Tribal Relations/Continued and Future Implementation of Existing Laws

Q. Good morning, Mr. President, President Obama. I am the Vice President of the Navajo Nation. I got one small question to you. I watched the message you gave us a while ago. It's very good; I like it. And your commitment—you have fulfilled your commitment. But one thing I'm worried about, on behalf of all the nation here and also the Navajo Nation, what this administration—you went and reached out to the Native American nation, which you're doing it now. It would be nice, it would be—if you could work with us, with the congressional people, and make it a mandate that we should—that the United States Government should work with the Indian nation, because every 4 years—and I know you're going to win your reelection; you have another—some numbers of years. But the thing I'm worried about is the end of the term and what happens with all the plans that we're going to be putting together with your administration—our administration. I supported you, and the Navajo Nation did. What happened to all that?

I really don't want to stand here and complain about we've been lied to again. Through the histories of all Indian tribe—the treaty that were made between the United States and Indian tribe, it's been broken a lot. How can we make it so solid that it stays there, no matter who, what administration comes in? And I think we need to work on that, sir.

The President. Well, I appreciate that. Look, obviously, the executive branch's job is to implement law. Now, a lot of these treaties, a lot of these consultations are embedded in law, and we've got to make sure that they're implemented. So for the next 8 years—the next 4 years, at least—[laughter]—let me not jump the gun—for the next 3 years and 1 month—[laughter]—that I'm assured of this current position, we are going to make sure that we put the infrastructure and the framework in place so that a new dynamic, a new set of relationships have been established.

And to the extent that we can partner with Congress to lock some of those good habits in and end some of the bad habits that we've seen in the past, that's something that we'll be very interested in doing.

So I think that should be part of the agenda of consultation over the next several years, is how do we continue to institutionalize some of the best practices of consultation and collaboration and partnership that's so important. So thank you so much.

All right? I want to make sure that some folks in the back get—are there any other microphones here? Is this the only one? Okay, because the—I'm going to go ahead and call on this gentleman, but I don't want everybody just in the front seat to get a question, so go ahead.

Situation of Alaska Natives/President's Intention to Visit Alaska

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And thank you for fulfilling your commitment to meet with the tribes in the very first year of your administration. We really appreciate it. My name is Bill Martin. I'm President of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, but today I represent all the native peoples of Alaska. I present to you our request for assistance.

We ask that you strengthen and support our sovereignty for all Alaska tribes by supporting our fishing and subsistence rights; by providing equity and funding across all tribal government; providing an infrastructure of basic services in our villages, of plumbing in town hall meetings, in roads, sewer, et cetera; provide adequate emergency response for suicide prevention and health care services. Suicide is a very high rate in Alaska. It's—for all of Alaska, is twice the national average. For natives, it's five times the average. And for young men between 15 and 27, it's 12 times the national average. And it's a serious issue, and we hope that we can be able to provide more funding to combat suicide.

I'd like you to help us by providing opportunities to enhance education, cultural language teachings within our community. Many Indians and Alaska Natives live in third world countries. There is a great poverty of unsustainable economies in Indian Country. There is a lack of capital.

Before the economic crisis, bank lending was very weak to nonexistent for tribal businesses. In similar conditions in underdeveloped countries, the United States offers effective programs to induce economic investments, two programs like the Overseas Private Investment Corporation and the Export-Import Bank. We ask that you commit to develop similar federally backed institutions designed specifically for tribes, Alaska Natives, Alaska Native corporations.

We ask for—that you work with us to stop the disastrous erosion caused by global warming. Many of our villages are ready to slide off into the waters of Alaska, and in some cases, there will be absolutely no hope; we will need to move many villages.

We ask you to ensure tribal and rural equity for Alaska tribes, meaning those that live in the urban areas and also in the rural areas; support Alaska tribes to promote self-determination

for all of Alaska people; to help and promote public safety from child abuse, from spousal abuse.

And finally, Mr. President, Alaska is a great land. Were it superimposed on a map of the continental United States, it would stretch from Florida to California, from North Dakota to Texas. And the peoples of Alaska are just as different as the differences in this whole country, but we stand united. We stand united in the pursuit of happiness for our families and to train them and bring them as we were brought up for hundreds and hundreds of years since time immemorial. And we stand united in inviting you to visit this great land.

Every Alaska Native has that special place to go to get away from it all. And if you ever decide to want to get away from it all, come see one of us. *[Laughter]* We'll take you to that special place.

The President. All right. Well, I often want to get away from it all. *[Laughter]* So I'm very much looking forward to visiting Alaska. Thank you for sharing that important information with us. One thing I'd note that, obviously, you guys are going to be here all day, so some of these key written statements you're going to be able to present to not only the relevant White House staff but also the Secretaries that were—that are going to be participating, as well as Members of Congress who are participating.

The only thing I do want to make sure you understand is when I do visit Alaska, it's going to be during the summer. *[Laughter]* So I just wanted to be clear about that.

Okay. This—sorry, I'm getting old, so—there you go. Go ahead.

Trust Status of Former Tribal Lands/Improvement of Federal-Tribal Cooperation

Q. Good morning.

The President. Good morning.

Q. Honorable President Barack Obama, he who cares——

[The questioner says something in his native language. No translation was provided. He then continued in English, as follows]

It's good to see you today. My name is Wilfrid Cleveland from the Ho-Chunk Nation, President of the Ho-Chunk Nation, the Bear Clan, from the State of Wisconsin.

Our people had organized a government in 1963. Topics that they discussed was land, health, education, employment, unemployment. And today we come here before you with those same concerns, 46 years later. So these are—in our ceremonies at home, in our hearts, we talk—we think about that today would be a day different from day when our elders, when our ancestors, made treaties with the United States. They were broken; they were not honored, but today would be different.

We have entitlements for these programs that are given to us. Rather than being able to come to you and compete with other tribes, each tribe should be entitled to all these as part of the trust responsibility. So we ask that you would make this possible for us so that we would be having a good relationship with one another when we come to meetings.

And, Mr. President, we have our—we are not—we were not born owners of these lands, but stewards. Today, we have to purchase our lands back, and we have this process of putting our land back into trust—*[inaudible]*—trust process, and that's a long process that is there. A part of it is—part of this process is giving States, county, and even local governments an

opportunity to say whether these lands can go into trust or not. Now I ask you, is that nation-to-nation relationship?

Each of our nations have warriors, and today I name a few of those warriors: I name Roger Jourdain, he was the chairman of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa; I name Wendell Chino, he was the chairman of the Mescalero Apache Nation; Vice President Hubert Humphrey; Senator Ted Kennedy; the then-Senator Walter Mondale. Each of these warriors gave their full support to the advancement of all Native nations. We today are here to follow in those footprints so that our people can enjoy our sovereignty.

The U.S. Government was formed with a native concept. Today, we, the Native nations, have formed governments, and we must continuously fight to maintain our sovereignty and our lands we were once stewards of. We must have the same relationship with the Federal Government as the States. We must not be restricted under the watchdog of the BIA, but rather be enhanced with a nation-to-nation relationship.

We tribal leaders understand the task you face in the steering the country out of the difficult times that we are in. However, on your visit to the Crow Reservation, you told those gathered that you intend to acknowledge the tragic history of Native Americans over the past three centuries, then promising during these—we will continue to support you and your administration during these challenging times as you walk with us to make us stronger nations for our future generations. Thank you for your time.

The President. All right, thank you. Thank you.

Let's see if—I want to get a woman's voice in here. [*Laughter*] So how about this young lady right here? Right there in the blue.

Message for the President

Q. Hi. My name is Alicia Reft. I'm the President of the Karluk IRA Traditional Council. Karluk is a small village in Kodiak Island, Alaska. And I have lots to say, but the two most important things were that my two nephews from home wanted me to shake your hand if I can, and an elder that works at Safeway—her name's Erlinda—she said to make sure and say hi and that she loves you very much.

The President. Well, you tell Linda I love her back. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you.

The President. Thank you.

All right, the—right there in the red, right in the middle.

Federal-Tribal Relations/Support for American Indian Children

[*The questioner says something in her native language. No translation was provided. She then continued in English, as follows*]

Q. My name is Theresa Two Bulls. I'm President of the Oglala Sioux Tribe from the State of South Dakota and a member of the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association. Thank you for meeting with us today, for opening up your heart. It's good to hear your words. They're dear to our hearts.

I come on two issues—honor the treaties. Too long have—they have been not honored by the Federal Government. And you talk about a change—now is the change. Allow us and work with us to exercise our sovereignty, our self-determination.

And the second issue is our children. Our children are sacred. We want the best for them. And we ask that you help us to ensure a better education, a better life, well-being for our children, because they're going to be the future leaders.

And I say thank you, and we love you.

[*The questioner says something in her native language. No translation was provided.*]

The President. Thank you. All right. Let's see, the gentleman right there—right here in front. Yeah.

Tribal Lands and Environmental Management

Q. Thank you very much, Mr. President. My name is John Berrey. I'm the Chairman of the Quapaw Tribe in Oklahoma. And on behalf of the other Oklahoma tribes, I want to thank you for coming here today.

I have one request. The Quapaw Tribe has the honor of having the largest Superfund site in the United States; it's Tar Creek Superfund site. We have 72 million tons of mining waste on our lands. And I would like to ask you to come visit it and see the devastation caused by this management of tribal resources and help elevate tribes to the same level of States when we're dealing with the remediation of Superfund sites so we can have the same voice as the State in designing a better future and environment for our people.

Thank you.

The President. Good. Well, this is really important. Obviously, the whole issue of environmental integrity on tribal lands is something that too often has slipped through the cracks or decisions have been made in the absence of consultation with the tribes. So this is going to be a top priority generally—improving our environmental quality. The issue of climate change is something that we are working diligently on, and everybody has a huge interest in this, no place more so than Alaska, where the effects are already beginning to be felt, and it's starting to change, I think, the ability of native peoples to—whose economies oftentimes may be based on interacting with the natural environment there. They're already starting to have to make significant changes that have to be addressed.

So my hope is one of the things that will be taking place during today's session and then continuing is you've got a great Secretary of the Interior who cares about natural resources. But we've also got an outstanding EPA Director in Lisa Jackson. And figuring out how we can improve environmental coordination with the tribal nations so that we're matching the energy agenda that I already spoke about in my speech with an environmental agenda, I think, is going to be not only good for native peoples, it's also going to be good for the United States generally. And we have a lot to learn from your nations in order to create the kind of sustainability in our environment that is—we so desperately need.

So I will make sure that somebody follows up directly with your tribe on this Superfund site. All right. Uh-oh, now everybody is raising their hand. [*Laughter*]

All right, this young lady right here. Yes.

Offshore Drilling Impact on Alaska Native Communities

Q. Thank you. Thank you for this opportunity. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm so privileged and honored to be here. My name is Caroline Cannon, President for the Native Village of Point Hope. I came here with a message from my tribe, that we are impacted with the offshore

drilling, the decision that's been made on behalf of our tribe during the Bush administration. And we would like you to overturn that.

I live in the coastal village and exactly where climate change has a big impact. We are a whaling community, and we need help. It's happening so fast that last year—a couple of years ago, there were some incidents that occurred because of the ice condition during the whaling season, so I would like help. And I think that—we also are around the coast of the Red Dog Mine, and they have decided that they're going to have a discharge pipeline to our ocean, where we highly rely on our food resources.

So thank you again. And my 7-year-son, Jalen Calen—Cannon, says, big hello. He said I should give you a hug, but I know that's not an opportunity right now. *[Laughter]* But thank you.

The President. Maybe after the Q&A, I'll get that hug in. *[Laughter]* I want you to know, just with respect to offshore drilling, Secretary Salazar is in the process of reviewing some of the directives that were issued under the previous administration. And I am confident that as part of that overarching review, that consultation with potentially affected nations will be part of Ken's process.

So—okay, you know, let's see, this gentleman right here with the headdress.

Tribal Land Development/Mineral Rights/Housing

Q. Honorable President Obama, this is the second time I get a chance to address you. I've been wearing this war bonnet, and I've been really displeasing these gentle ladies behind me, but this is yours. In our Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara ways, you don't give a gift to a tent, you give it to the individual. You are our Commander in Chief for the soldiers; I'm a lieutenant in the Army Reserve. My name is Ee-Ba-Da-Gish, White-Headed Eagle. I am the Chairman of the Three Affiliated Tribes, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara. My name is Marcus Dominick Levings. I first met you in Grand Forks at your VIP room. My mother is Dowah Rezilda Brady Wells. She gave you the red, white, and blue star quilt—

The President. Yes, it was beautiful.

Q. —with all the prayers. She sent this to you as well, so I'll give it to whatever Secret Service people I need to do that. *[Laughter]*

President Obama, I have two issues for my people, the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara, 11,000 tribal members who live in western North Dakota on top of the Williston Basin, the Bakken Formation. We have oil and gas development today, Mr. President. We have an opportunity to be independent from any means of Federal programs, any type of issues that we had been not needing before the flood of Elbowoods, North Dakota, in the 1950s. In the spirit of progress, our elders, our ancestors gave up their bottom land. Ninety percent of our people live there, Mr. President. And now they're up on high hilltops, 77-below wind chill factors in winter.

We are the tribe, the Mandan, Hidatsas, and Arikaras, who saved Lewis and Clark. We were the ones who made it so they can go out to blaze the trail to Portland. Now we come for you to ask for some help on our energy development, to get the 49-step process eliminated so our elders, who are dying as we speak, can generate opportunities to receive royalties on their minerals.

Second, with all this economic development boom that's going on, Mr. President, in the Williston Basin and Fort Berthold Reservation, 1 million acres, we need homes. We are short 1,000 homes, Mr. President, home ownership and rentals as well. So on behalf of the Tribal Business Council and my elders, I stand humbly in front of you, Ee-Ba-Da-Gish, and ask for your help. Thank you.

[The questioner says something in his native language. No translation was provided.]

The President. Thank you. I've got time only for one more question unfortunately, and I'm not going to be able to get to everybody, so right there in the middle, right there in the middle.

Tribal Lands

Q. Persistence, and that's a characteristic of all Native Americans. That's why I stood there for a long time.

So thank you very much, Mr. President, for meeting with us today on this historical day. And we are truly grateful for this opportunity. My name is Leslie Lohse. I'm with the Paskenta Nomlaki in California. And in California, there are many landless tribes. We do have gaming out there, and I would ask that you ask the Secretary of Interior to make some policies that are much more clarifying in getting our lands into trust, because it's causing some issues out there between the gaming tribes—maybe nine gaming tribes—and with the local communities and our State itself. So we ask that you ask them to make these things more clearly for all of us to abide by.

And another thing that I'd like to ask you to do is to take care of our 8(a) program because those of us that—those that are landless out there can develop economic development opportunities through the 8(a) contracting program, and that may ease some of the burdens that some of the landless tribes are, because you don't need to have land to operate that.

So—and there is an attack on our 8(a) program—I perceive it as an attack—because it is limiting. We just barely started 3 years ago with ours, and we're starting to get rolling, and now they want to change the rules. So I ask that you pay mind to that, that we not inhibit our growth in that way so that we can purchase some of our lands back and grow from that, instead of being dependent on gaming.

The President. Okay. Well, listen, I am so grateful that all of you are here. I appreciate what you've shared with me. But the most important opportunity that you will have today is to interact directly with the Department heads, the Secretaries who are in charge of implementation on a whole range of these issues.

So I want intensive discussion and dialog with them. Present to them your concerns, your specific recommendations. They are here to listen and to learn and to advise. I am going to meet back up with you at the end of the day. And if you guys have just been partying and not working—*[laughter]*—I'll know. *[Laughter]*

So I hope you have a wonderfully productive conference today. I will see you at the end of it. And, again, I appreciate everything that you guys have done. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:37 a.m. at the Department of the Interior. In his remarks, he referred to Tlingit elder Clarence Jackson, Sr; Senior Policy Adviser for Native American Affairs Kimberly K. Teehee; and Associate Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement and Deputy Associate Director of the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs Jodi Archambault Gillette.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations Conference, opening remarks, and a discussion with tribal leaders.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Berrey, John; Black Eagle, Hartford; Black Eagle, Mary; Cannon, Caroline; Chu, Steven; Clinton, William J.; Donovan, Shaun L.S.; Dorgan, Byron L.; Duncan, Arne; EchoHawk, Larry; Gillette, Jodi Archambault; Herseth Sandlin, Stephanie; Holder, Eric H., Jr.; Jackson, Clarence, Jr.; Jackson, Lisa P.; Keel, Jefferson; Levings, Marcus D.; Martin, William E.; Reft, Alicia; Salazar, Kenneth L.; Teehee, Kimberly K.; Vilsack, Thomas J.

Subjects: Agriculture, Department of : Secretary; Alaska : Climate change, effects of; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Cherokee Nation; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Climate change, effects on cultures and livelihoods; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Education :: College dropout rate; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Education :: Federal Government funding; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Education :: High school dropout rate; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Education :: Reservation schools, renovations and improvement efforts; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Education :: Tribal Colleges and Universities; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Electricity and water supplies, access; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Energy products and power transmission grid development, permit process; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Job creation and growth; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Pawnee Nation; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Postsecondary education :: Energy auditor training program; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Poverty; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Power transmission grid, access to; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Public health issues; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Quapaw Tribe ; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Reservations :: Sexual assault rate; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Reservations :: Violent crime rate; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Solar and wind energy, potential development on tribal lands; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Tribal consultation with the Federal Government; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Tribal lands, environmental issues; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Tribal law enforcement agencies, Federal Government assistance; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Tribal Nations Conference; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Tribal nations, relations with the Federal Government; American Indians and Alaska Natives : Unemployment rate; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Education, Department of : Secretary; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Offshore drilling, review of prior policies; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Energy, Department of : Secretary; Environment : Climate change; Environmental Protection Agency : Administrator; Environmental Protection Agency : Superfund sites; Health and Human Services, Department of : Indian Health Service ; Health and Human Services, Department of : Indian Health Service; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Housing and Urban Development, Department of : Secretary; Interior, Department of : Secretary; Interior, Department of the : Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs; Interior, Department of the : Indian Affairs, Bureau of; Interior, Department of the : Secretary; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Legislation, proposed : "Tribal Law and Order Act of 2009"; Oklahoma : Tar Creek Superfund site; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Native American Affairs, Senior Policy Adviser for; White House Office : Intergovernmental Affairs, Office of; White House Office : Public Engagement, White House Office of.

DCPD Number: DCPD200900886.