

Editor's note: In an effort to publish information about the 2008 presidential candidates and their recognition of Native issues, we visited each of their websites. The items on these two pages are what we found. We've included details so you too can take a look.

Barack Obama's Principles for Stronger Tribal Communities

This information can be found at www.barackobama.com; click on People; click on First Americans; click on Learn Where Barack Stands

"Perhaps more than anyone else, the Native American community faces huge challenges that have been ignored by Washington for too long. It is time to empower Native Americans in the development of the national policy agenda."

— Barack Obama

"We've got to make sure we are not just having a BIA that is dealing with the various Native American tribes; we've got to have the President of the United States meeting on a regular basis with the Native American leadership and ensuring relationships of dignity and respect."

— Barack Obama, Elko, NV, January 18, 2008

The Problem

The hundreds of Indian tribes in America face a unique set of challenges. Issues like sovereignty, health care, and education — issues that are central to tribes' future prosperity and embedded in the federal government's responsibility — are often neglected. Barack Obama is committed to tribal nation building and enforcing the federal government's obligations to Indian people.

Barack Obama's Plan

Sovereignty, Tribal-Federal Relations and the Trust Responsibility

Native American tribal nations are sovereign, self-governing political entities and enjoy a government-to-government relationship with the United States federal government that is recognized expressly in treaties with the United States.

- **Self-Determination:** Barack Obama supports the principle of tribal self-determination, with recognition that the federal government must honor its treaty obligations and fully enable tribal self-governance.
- **Consultation and Inclusion:** In furtherance of the government-to-government relationship, Barack Obama will include tribal leadership in the important policy determinations that impact Indian Country. Obama will appoint an American Indian policy advisor on his senior White House staff so that Indian Country has a direct interface at the highest level of the Obama Administration. In addition, Obama will host a White House "Tribal G8" — an annual meeting with Native American leaders to develop a national Indian policy agenda.

- **Honor the Trust Responsibility:** Barack Obama recognizes that honoring the government-to-government relationship requires fulfillment of the United States' trust responsibility to tribes and individual Indians. More specifically, Obama is committed to meaningful reform of the broken system that manages and administers the trust lands and other trust assets belonging to tribes and individual Indians. Further, he is committed to resolving equitably with both tribes and individual Indians litigation resulting from the past failures in the administration and accounting of their trust assets.

Health Care

The Indian Health Service estimates that it receives only 55 percent of the federal funding it requires. Federal per capita funding for Indian health care amounts to about half of the federal per capita health funding for federal prisoners. Indians are the most at-risk minority group for health problems like diabetes, which they suffer from at a rate 249 percent higher than the national average. Moreover, Indians have the nation's highest death rates for tuberculosis and suicide. After Haiti, men on the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations in South Dakota have the lowest life expectancy in the Western Hemisphere.

- **Indian Health Service:** Barack Obama voted in the Senate to provide an additional \$1 billion for IHS to address these disparities. Additionally, he was an original co-sponsor of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 2007, which mandates modernization of the Indian health care system and strengthens urban Indian health facilities. Obama has fought against the Bush Administration's attempt to eliminate urban health care for Indians not living in reservation communities. Obama opposed a federal land acquisition program that would have diverted funds from the Special Diabetes Program for Indians and the Alcohol and Substance Abuse program. Obama supports sufficient funding for IHS and proper staffing and maintenance for IHS facilities.

Education

Education is the key to improving the lives of Native Americans and empowering tribal nations to build a better future. Educational policies in the 1970s attempted to reverse past federal policies aimed at eradicating Na-

tive American languages and cultures, but Native Americans still suffer from some of the lowest high school graduation and college matriculation rates in the nation. We must continue to honor our obligations to Native Americans by providing tribes with the educational resources promised by treaty and federal law.

- **Indian Language Education:** Tribes are struggling to preserve their languages. It is estimated that by 2050 only 20 of the over 500 Native languages once spoken will remain. Research shows that instruction in tribal language increases Native American academic performance in other areas like math and science. Barack Obama supports funding for Native language immersion and preservation programs.
- **No Child Left Behind:** The goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is the right one — ensuring that all children meet high education standards — but the law has significant flaws that need to be addressed, including in Indian Country. Unfulfilled promises, ineffective implementation and shortcomings in the design of the law itself have created countless obstacles for tribal educators. Barack Obama would fund No Child Left Behind and reform the law to better incorporate Title VII, the law's Indian, Hawaiian, and Alaskan education provision. Obama's plan would provide greater flexibility in integrating Native languages, cultures, and communities into school programs in a manner consistent with principles of tribal sovereignty.
- **Early Childhood Education:** Research shows that half of low-income children start school up to two years behind their peers in pre-school skills and that these early achievement gaps continue throughout elementary school. Barack Obama supports increasing funding for the Head Start program, including the American Indian and Alaska Native Head Start Programs, to provide American Indian preschool children with critically important learning skills. He also appreciates the role of parental involvement in the success of Head Start and has called on states to replicate the Illinois model of Preschool for All. Tribes should also be given the opportunity to implement culturally appropriate versions of this program.
- **Indian School Construction:** Many government-funded Indian schools

are dilapidated and many are simply too small to meet the needs of growing Indian populations. A safe, comfortable place to learn is critical to receiving a proper education. Barack Obama is committed to repairing and building Indian schools.

- **Tribal Colleges:** Tribal colleges have played a critical role in improving the lives of Native Americans. Obama supports increased funding for operations and facility construction, as well as the removal of bureaucratic impediments so tribal colleges can thrive.

Religious Freedom and Cultural Protection

- **Cultural Rights and Sacred Places Protection:** Native American sacred places and site-specific ceremonies are under threat from development, pollution and vandalism. Barack Obama supports legal protections for sacred places and cultural traditions, including Native ancestors' burial grounds and churches.

Economic & Infrastructure Protection

Native Americans experience some of the most severe socioeconomic conditions in the United States. Poverty and its effects are pervasive, with more than a quarter of all Native Americans living in poverty and unemployment rates reaching 80 percent on some reservations. Obama's experience as a community organizer working in poor neighborhoods plagued by high unemployment has taught him that there is no single solution to community poverty. Therefore, he supports using a comprehensive approach that includes investment in physical, human and institutional infrastructure, increased access to capital, the removal of barriers to development, and above all, authentic government-to-government relationships between the federal government and tribes.

- **Minimum Wage:** Barack Obama believes that people who work full time should not live in poverty. In 2007, Obama supported legislation that increased the Federal minimum wage for the first time in 10 years. Even though the minimum wage will rise to \$7.25 an hour by 2009, the minimum wage's real purchasing power will still be below what it was in 1968. As president, Obama will further raise the minimum wage to \$9.50 an hour by 2011, index it to inflation and increase the Earned Income Tax Credit to make sure that full-time workers can earn