



Photo by Diane Rodriquez

Gracie Callis, Michael Turner, Shay Lucas and Tehya Seltenreich belt out *Let It Go* from the movie *Frozen* during the Siletz Tribal Head Start Transition Ceremony in Siletz on May 23. See more photos of graduates from various schools on pages 9-12.

## President's visit to Standing Rock Sioux Reservation leads to new steps to strengthen Tribal economies and improve education for Native youth

WASHINGTON – The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) applauds President Barack Obama for upholding his ongoing commitment to Tribal nations and Native people by traveling to the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation on June 13.

In his speech, Obama expressed pride that “the government-to-government relationship between Washington and Tribal nations is stronger than ever” and affirmed that his administration is “determined to partner with Tribes.”

The president's visit is a catalyst for several new efforts to strengthen Tribal nations through education and economic development. The White House released a fact sheet acknowledging that while his administration has seen “unprecedented progress” on Tribal priorities, “the president recognizes that much work remains.”

The fact sheet outlined a number of new initiatives, many of them longtime priorities of Tribal leaders identified through NCAI resolutions and regional intertribal organizations, as part of Tribal leader briefing materials for the annual

White House Tribal Nations Summits or in other White House meetings and roundtable events.

The new initiatives include improving the Bureau of Education, supporting the academic achievement of all Native students and supporting economic development in Tribal communities.

Since taking office, Obama has remained steadfast in honoring our nation-to-nation relationship. He has kept his commitment to host the annual White House Tribal Nations Summit in Washington, D.C. These summits have facilitated unprecedented engagement between Tribal leaders and the president and members of his Cabinet.

At the 2013 White House Tribal Nations Summit, Obama announced that he would visit Indian Country himself – a longtime priority of Tribal leaders. His visit to Standing Rock fulfills that promise.

This historic visit is the first by a sitting president in more than 15 years and makes Obama only the fourth president in history to ever visit Indian Country.

NCAI expects the president to address the economic development needs of Tribal nations and the needs of Native youth. While Tribal youth are included in the administration's My Brother's Keeper initiative, this administration has always known that Native children have specific cultural and education needs that require focused attention.

For this reason, Indian Country has witnessed an unprecedented collaboration between Secretary Sally Jewell at the Department of the Interior and Secretary Arne Duncan at the Department of Education to study what is necessary to make sure that all of our Native students – in public, Tribal and Bureau of Indian Education schools – have the tools they need to ensure a strong future for all Native children.

In 2013, Jewell visited the Pueblo of Laguna to see firsthand how a Tribal education department was improving the quality of school operations, performance and structure of BIE schools. She witnessed a nation that was engaged and

excited to participate in efforts to improve educational outcomes in Indian Country.

It will take visits like this – the agencies working together with Tribal governments and national organizations such as NCAI and the National Indian Education Association to ensure that our students can be the future Tribal leaders, teachers, health care workers and entrepreneurs that our nations and the United States need to thrive for generations to come.

The president's visit builds upon ongoing efforts of his administration to work closely with Tribal nations on policy that affects their citizens. We trust the visit will be a catalyst for more policies that will not only succeed today, but cement the positive relationship between Tribal governments and the federal government well into the future.

President Obama has made annual summits between our nations, in his words, “almost routine.” We trust this will be the continuation of his administration's engagement with our nations that makes visits to Indian Country by the president and his Cabinet routine too.