



Photos by Diane Rodriguez

Peter Hatch, temporary historical researcher/cultural resources technician, shares basketry and other elements of Siletz Tribal culture with young people.



Rebecca J. Dobkins, curator at the Hallie Ford Museum in Salem and professor of anthropology at Willamette University, talks with Tribal Council member Robert Kentta and Tribal Chairman Delores Pigsley.

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Indian Nations, con't from page 1

commitments. Tribes were invaded and disturbed. Many of us were relocated off our homelands. My own Tribe had our reservation land taken without our consent.

Despite continuing breeches of these promises, in hundreds of instances, Tribal governments entered into solemn agreements with the federal government. My own great-great-grandfather, Kel-Kahl-Tsoot, signed the Treaty of Point Elliott in 1855.

Through these treaties, Tribal nations relinquished significant portions of our original territories. And the federal government became the trustee for hundreds of Tribal governments and the millions of acres of Tribal lands that remained.

This means, now and forever, that every federal official is our trustee.

It's the sacred responsibility that all of our elected officials share. That is where our story of progress and partnership begins.

From the very start, Tribal governments have been on equal footing with state governments. And must remain so today.

In exchange for our lands, the federal government made three promises: To never take our remaining lands without our consent. To safeguard our right to govern ourselves on those lands. And to enact laws that protect our economies, our treaties and our ways of life.

This is the foundation of the trust relationship on which we have built our modern government-to-government partnership.

Recently, we worked with Congress to pass the Tribal Law and Order Act and the Violence Against Women Act to strengthen community safety and Tribal justice systems.

And now, Tribal law enforcement departments like the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla in Oregon have access to national criminal databases that help them better protect their people.

We worked with Congress to pass the HEARTH Act and the Indian Trust Asset Reform Act to further empower Tribes

to make decisions about their lands and their assets.

And now, Tribes like Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo in New Mexico are regulating wind and solar energy leases on their lands.

We worked with Congress to pass the Indian Health Care Improvement Act to modernize Tribal health care networks and ensure that every Native American and Alaskan Native receives the health care promised in our treaties.

And now, Tribal governments are implementing these – and other – new policies.

These policies work because they provide us the flexibility we need to craft our own local solutions to our own distinct challenges. In the process, we are innovating in our governments, revitalizing our communities and growing our economies.

And we continue to partner with other governments to meet common challenges.

Partnerships like these are especially important in rural areas. More than 70 percent of Indian Country is rural. Indian people know firsthand that quality health care is harder to get outside of the cities.

Native peoples like the Coeur d'Alene Tribe of Idaho have set out to change that. In partnership with the city of Plummer, Idaho, they built the Benewah Medical Center. Today, the center serves thousands of people from Plummer and the surrounding area.

Tribes are stepping up not only to take care of their own people, but to take care of their entire region.

Indian people define prosperity in many ways, not just economic but also spiritual, cultural and collective prosperity. When Tribal nations lift up communities, we want no one to get left behind.

That is why the Citizen Potawatomi Nation of Oklahoma built a health care center for the non-Native spouses and children of Tribal citizens.

There are countless examples of Tribal governments investing in their com-

munities and creating jobs for their own people and those who live in surrounding communities.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community – a Tribe of just a few hundred – employs more than 4,000 through its retail, gaming and other businesses.

The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians has been the economic engine for its region of Mississippi, transforming one of the poorest areas in the country into a growing economy that employs thousands.

Nearly 72,000 Tribal farm operators run more than 56,000 farms with a market value of products sold that exceeds \$3 billion.

Indian Country stands ready to partner with anyone and everyone who will work with us to help build a stronger America.

So this is what we ask of the new Congress and the new administration:

Make good on the promise of our trust relationship. Abide by the treaties. Affirm the wisdom of local decision making by Indian Country, for Indian Country.

Together, we must remove the obstacles that prevent Tribes from fulfilling our potential as nations and neighbors. We must ensure that Tribes can deploy all of the essential tools that all governments must have in order to build prosperous communities.

Not everyone realizes that most Tribes cannot tax sales on their reservations because of the problem of dual taxation by the states. A few states have reached tax agreements with Tribes, but for the most part the states enjoy taxing our reservations without providing services.

We have a great opportunity for the Department of the Interior to issue new regulations that will eliminate the unfair burden of dual taxation on reservation economies.

The new administration has already scheduled a series of consultation meetings that start next week at Swinomish.

Unlike every state and local government, Tribes cannot issue tax-exempt

bonds for economic development because the IRS only allows us to use them for public works – like water treatment.

This unfairness is short-sighted and cannot stand. Tribal governments should be able to use the same tools that other governments use every single day.

Congress should include Indian Country in broader tax reform. And when it does, it must give us full authority to generate revenue, access capital and invest locally.

In a rare moment of bipartisanship, Congress recently passed the General Welfare Exclusion Act, recognizing that Tribal government programs benefitting Tribal members are not taxable by the federal or state governments.

Tribal governments have demonstrated that when we exercise our innate authority, with adequate resources and autonomy, we will devise local solutions that work for our communities.

We plan and budget our governing operations based on commitments made through the federal trust responsibility. Like other governments, we provide police services, education, fire protection and a range of core public services for our people.

But Tribal self-sufficiency is not merely an integral component of the trust responsibility. It is also an investment opportunity.

Investing in Indian Country has proven, time and time again, to produce high returns. And perhaps no investment has a greater potential upside than infrastructure.

Today, the National Congress of American Indians released an initial report regarding Tribal infrastructure investments. It provides Tribal leaders and policymakers with data to inform the many ways in which Indian Country is proposing to meet its infrastructure needs.

To us, infrastructure means more than roads and bridges. More than housing and broadband Internet connection. It also means education and health care infrastructure. Workforce development