



Tribal Council member Gloria Ingle (left) and Peter Hatch (light blue shirt) discuss Siletz Tribal history and culture with interested individuals.



Tribal Council member Joseph Lane Jr. (left) greets Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson.



Photos by Diane Rodriguez

Tribal member Izaiah Fisher talks about his bow tie, among several things, with Oregon Governor Kate Brown. Fisher is a member of the Grand Ronde Youth Council.

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infrastructure. Data and planning infrastructure to support smart, informed decision-making.

Both Indian Country and rural America, where infrastructure has fallen into a state of disrepair, share a common concern here. Necessary maintenance and new projects have met delay after delay.

Let me be clear. Economic development is important. Investing in community infrastructure is important. And the most important long-term investments are in our children.

Partnering creates winning scenarios. When this Congress takes up infrastructure, it can create American jobs by addressing the \$388 million backlog of deferred maintenance of Bureau of Indian Education schools.

Statistics show that when Indian kids graduate from high school and college, they become contributing members of society. They break the cycle of drug and alcohol abuse. They break the cycle of jail and prison. They break the cycle of poverty and dependence on the federal government.

Educated Tribal members not only make their Tribal communities stronger, they also make America stronger.

Kevin Gover, the former assistant secretary for Indian Affairs, once said, "Sovereignty isn't about power. It's about responsibility."

We take that responsibility to our people very seriously. Just as we had long before European explorers and settlers arrived. Just as we always will.

President Ronald Reagan astutely recognized in 1988, and I quote, "Tribes need the freedom to spend the money available to them, to create a better quality of life and meet their needs as they define them. Tribes must make those decisions, not the federal government."

The federal government should partner with us to remove burdens that Tribal governments bear alone.

Our partnership and progress must extend to the issue of energy development.

Colorado does not charge a fee to explore for energy resources on its land and it turns around permits in two months. But to undertake the same exploration on Tribal land includes the additional challenge of the Bureau of Land Management fee of \$9,500 and takes seven months to turn around the same permit.

The result of regulations like these is that Tribes pay more and spend more time – a lot more – for a lot worse service.

This is a missed opportunity for all of America. Indian Country holds 20 percent of the oil and gas reserves. If fully developed, these resources could generate a trillion dollars in economic activity.

Whether or not to develop their energy resources is a choice that each Tribal nation must make – on their own terms and in accordance with their own values and goals. For Tribal nations that make this choice, the tools are in place to get started.

Congress created the Tribal Energy Loan Guarantee Program. If the federal government invested just \$9 million, it would support up to \$85 million for energy projects that would employ people in Indian Country and the surrounding communities.

Congress should back up their investment idea with real investment – and fund the program.

Tribal governments are proving what real investment can accomplish. Decades ago, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe of Colorado created their own Tribal Department of Energy and an economic growth fund. Today, they control the distribution of roughly 1 percent of America's natural gas supply.

Last year, one of the Moapa Band of Paiute of Nevada solar projects began powering more than 100,000 homes in Los Angeles. And last month, the seven bands of the Sioux Nation began construction on one of the largest wind power developments in the entire nation.

These projects are designed with sustainability in mind. Not just environmental sustainability, but also the cultural, spiritual and economic sustainability of the entire Tribal community.

Tribal governments embody the enduring values of Native peoples. We understand that each of our decisions connects our past to our future. We think about the Indian Country we want our grandchildren to pass on to theirs.

Culture matters. It is both who we are and how we govern. That is what makes working with Tribal governments different from working with other governments.

Each Tribe has its own customs and priorities. And that is why the local Tribe must be at the table where local decisions are made – starting at the earliest planning stages.

We have seen too many examples of what happens when Tribes do not have a seat at the table.

The Dakota Access Pipeline is one. In that case, the company consulted the nearby city – but not the nearby tribe – and made the mistake of turning sacred lands into a construction site.

Other Tribal governments have tried to prevent the worst – only to succeed in stopping the project after hundreds of gravesites were unearthed.

We cannot forget the period in the 1950s and '60s when rivers across the west were dammed for irrigation and power. Hundreds of thousands of acres of Tribal lands were flooded. Hundreds of Tribal homes were destroyed.

In the Columbia River region, the salmon way of life was threatened. All disturbed without the consent of Tribal governments. All in violation of treaties that protected these lands and resources.

One day, the Spokane Tribe in Washington, like so many others, woke up to find that there were no more salmon in their river.

When this happens, no one wins. Not Tribal governments. Not the federal government. Not developers. Everyone pays a high price. An unnecessary price.

And yet, there are so many instances in which we see what's possible when Native people do have a seat at the table.

The Blackfeet from Montana partnered with hunters, anglers, conservationists, energy companies and the Department of the Interior to cancel more than 40,000 acres of illegal oil and gas leases. By working together, they prevented drilling on the sacred lands at Badger-Two Medicine.

We will continue to work with the Department of the Interior to create lasting solutions.

Partnerships have proven to generate the highest return on investment, for they avoid the high costs of conflict between governments. Work with us to identify and implement win-win solutions.

There is a Seneca proverb that says: "He who would do great things should not attempt them all alone."

Our partnership goes back a long way. Back to the time before the stars and stripes were first sewn into the flag and before the republic for which it stands was born.

Tribal nations have been a constant. Like the stars that never change.

We stood with you at every critical moment in American history. From the Revolutionary War to the World Wars to the Vietnam War to the war on terror. A greater percentage of Native people have served and died in the military than of any other group of Americans.

We will always stand with you. We will always fight alongside you. And through our age-old partnership, we will usher in a new era of progress.

God bless you. God bless our Indian Nations. And God bless the United States of America.