



Photos by Andy Taylor

Above: Patrick Shawver and Isaac Butler (from left) stand with coaches Lee Butler, Reggie Butler Jr. and Darin Rilatos during an assembly at Siletz Valley School. Shawver placed third in the 170 pound weight division.

Right: Isaac Butler receives congratulations from Sam Tupou, school superintendent/principal.

Congratulations to Isaac Butler of Siletz Valley Early College Academy, 1A-2A state wrestling champion in the 182 pound weight division!



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of governments. Hundreds of treaties and laws, and the Constitution itself – all affirm the inherent sovereignty our Tribes possess.

We should never forget that when Tribal nations agreed to accept a smaller land base, the federal government promised to safeguard our right to govern ourselves. To enable Tribal governments to deliver essential services and provide them ample resources to do so effectively. To help us manage our own lands and resources for the betterment of our communities.

That is the trust relationship embodied in the U.S. Constitution. Every member of Congress and every federal official is responsible for carrying out that trust. It's not a handout. It's a contract.

And it is best upheld when decisions are made at the local, Tribal level, by values-based governments that know the circumstances, challenges and priorities of local communities.

Tribal decision-making not only benefits Tribal communities, it benefits everyone.

For example, the Puyallup Tribe opened up its clinic in the Tacoma, Washington, metro area to provide care for the entire community, including non-Native people. My own Chickasaw Nation established a cutting-edge Diabetes Care Center to provide holistic health and preventative care, providing a model for clinics everywhere.

Two decades ago, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes took over management of its timber. The federal government, which manages an adjacent forest, barely breaks even on its timber sales. Meanwhile, the Tribes made \$2 on every dollar they spend – profit that they re-invest in their local communities.

That's why every American should make this demand of their own government:

Appreciate and honor the inherent sovereign rights of Tribal nations.

Respect our right to govern ourselves and our lands. Respect our unique political status as real nations with capable govern-

ments, as enshrined in laws, in treaties and in the Constitution of the United States.

Top-down government has been tried. It's time to go back to working with us.

Those are our priorities. Now, I want to share three basic principles to guide decision-making by policymakers to make those priorities a reality.

The first principle is to honor and affirm the federal-Tribal relationship.

This goes back to the very beginning of the United States. Tribal governments have always worked directly with the federal government – not through state governments. That direct nation-to-nation relationship must always be maintained. Right now, Congress is thinking about shifting more authority and funding to states, on the theory that states can more efficiently spend those funds. We, too, believe in local decision making. We've been doing it for thousands of years.

The second principle is to engage Tribal nations on all matters of national policy that potentially impact them. Not only is it the right thing to do. Not only does it make everyone better off. It is also the law. The Tribal consultation policies of federal agencies reflect that fact.

Two recent laws illustrate when the federal government takes its obligation to consult seriously – and when it doesn't.

I want to start with the one that failed to meet our standard of consultation – the recent tax overhaul.

For decades, Tribal leaders have advocated for the same set of tax priorities. We met often with members of Congress. We offered thoughtful, pragmatic, deficit-neutral policy proposals. But the bill came together in a flurry. And when the dust settled, Indian Country's top priorities were absent from the version the president signed in December.

That is completely unacceptable.

Today, we call on federal policymakers to consult Tribes on all major national policies and to take that responsibility seriously. In 2018, that means setting

things right by taking action on Indian Country's tax priorities:

Affirm our authority to regulate taxes and commerce on our lands, with the same degree of freedom that local and state governments enjoy. Allow us to use tax-exempt bonds the same way that other governments do. Exempt Tribes from federal excise taxes in the same way that states are exempted.

All we want is a level playing field. That is only fair and it's not too much to ask.

Like other governments, Tribes are an essential part of building a sustainable 21st century American economy. And we contribute best when we chart our own paths.

The third principle I want to discuss is reflected in the other positive example of recent legislation passed by Congress. Not only was it a product of meaningful consultation with, and input from, Tribal nations, it enacts the proven principle that Tribal self-determination and self-governance is the only policy that has ever worked for Indian Country.

I am talking about the Indian Employment, Training and Related Services Consolidation Act, which expands the Tribal workforce development program known as 477 and makes it permanent.

Under 477, Tribal nations and Native organizations can choose to consolidate up to 13 federal programs into a single process with a single reporting requirement, while still addressing distinct local needs and priorities. To date, more than 260 Tribal nations and Native organizations have taken advantage of 477, enhancing program efficiency and effectiveness and making real impacts in the lives of Native people.

Lives like Nicole Manzano's. At the age of 25, Nicole had been a caregiver for her grandmother for many years. Her grandmother's death was a huge blow and Nicole had to deal with her grief while building a new life with little work experience. She came to Citizen Potawatomi Work Force and Social Services, where 477-tethered programs gave her access

to training in résumé building, applying and interviewing. She got a local full-time job and assistance with gas vouchers, clothing and basic food until she became financially stable.

Stories like Nicole's prove that enhancing 477 is smart policy. It affirms that the program has been a success – and could be an even greater one. But we shouldn't stop there. We should use this model, which puts Tribal nations and communities in the driver's seat where they belong – as a model to replicate across all other areas of federal Indian policy.

Put simply, Tribal self-determination and self-governance works. This is a message that we must continue to bring to those in leadership.

My fellow Native citizens, the most powerful way to assert our right to determine our own destinies is on Election Day. Close elections happen. Just last month, candidates for one Virginia state house seat earned the same number of votes. A tie. They decided the election by drawing a name from a bowl.

The Native Vote can be the deciding vote in dozens of close races in 2018. In fact, the Native vote has the potential to swing elections for federal, state and local offices across this country.

We will support the candidates who respect the inherent sovereign rights we possess and who recognize the value we have to offer. Who support Tribal sovereignty, self-governance, consultation and meeting the trust responsibility.

Elected officials must hear our voices and heed our priorities – because we will be watching. And we will be voting. As one of the fast-growing populations in the country, our vote more and more is becoming a swing vote that candidates must engage.

We have our voice and our vote, and in 2018 we will exercise it like never before.

As it has been for thousands of years, the state of Indian nations is strong and everlasting.

We will always be here.

Thank you.