

## Clinton commits to Indian education as tribes talk economics

By Oscar Johnson

President Clinton signed an executive order mandating a new task force to address education needs in Indian Country at an Indian economic summit attended by U.S. government, Grand Ronde and other Native tribal officials.

"Today fewer than two-thirds of our Native Americans over the age of 25 hold high school degrees. Fewer than 10 percent go on to college," the President said. "If the trend continues, then the future for Native American children will become even bleaker."

During last month's Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities summit in Washington, D.C. the President seized on the opportunity to present and sign the American Indian and Alaska Native Education order in front of hundreds of Native representatives from around the United States.

On behalf of the Grand Ronde Tribe, Council members Kathryn Harrison and Leon "Chip" Tom, as well as Acting Executive Officer, Greg Archuleta and Intergovernmental Affairs lobbyist,

Justin Martin met with the highest heads of government at the meeting.

Archuleta said the summit focused on tribal economic self-determination exploring many alternatives to gaming as a source of tribal income in addition to unveiling the new executive order.

The new presidential order calls for a five-year task force comprising representatives from 15 federal branches including the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, Justice and the Interior to consult with tribal governments on their educational needs and priorities.

The goal of the order is to develop a "comprehensive federal Indian education policy" that will boost reading and math skills, high school completion and attendance, science educa-

tion, and the use of technology in Indian Country.

The order also aims to create safe drug-free schools and reduce the effects of poverty that impede education for Native Americans.

The President did not specifically address insufficient federal dollars needed to fund tribal programs such as education — an element behind the current Senate debate over a bill which seeks to solve the problem by redistributing funds from 10 percent of the country's wealthiest tribes to the poorest 20 percent.

Instead, the President offered understanding and supportive words.

"Long ago, many of your ancestors gave up land, water and mineral rights in exchange for peace, security, health care, and education from

the federal government. It is a solemn pact," Clinton told summit attendees after noting Indian Country's almost 70 percent underemployment and spiraling diabetes rates.

"While the United States government did not live up to its side of the bargain in the past, we can and we must honor it today and into the new millennium," added the President.

Another key component to the meeting was the chance various tribal representatives had to network with one another.

The opportunity tribes had to share success stories in economic development introduced Grand Ronde representatives to new ideas including generating income by entering into business contracts with the Department of Defense or major corporations such as General Motors, Archuleta said.

"It was exciting to see the variety of economic activity tribes have been able to get into beyond gaming," he said. "Many, like us, see gaming as just a window of opportunity to start saving and to provide services for members."

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**— President Clinton**



On August 6, 1998, President Clinton addressed the Conference on Building Economic Self-Determination in Indian Communities. At the event, the President signed an Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education. He also announced several initiatives for improving health care and economic opportunities for Native Americans. Pictured from left: **KATHRYN HARRISON**, Chair, Grand Ronde Tribe; **DR. DAVID BEAULIEU**, Director, Office of Indian Education, Dept. of Education; **YVONNE**

**NOVACK**, President, Nation Indian Education Association; **SHERRY RED OWL**, Redbud Sioux Tribe; **JOANN MORRIS**, Director, Office of Indian Education, Dept. of Interior; **ERNIE STEVENS, JR.**, National Congress of American Indians; **LORRAINE EDMO**, Executive Director, National Indian Education Association; **MELODEE MCCOY**, Native American Rights Fund; and **MICHAEL ANDERSON**, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Dept. of Interior.