

Kennedy attends Tribal Nations Conference

Obama says administration will continue working on Native issues in second term

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy attended her fourth consecutive Tribal Nations Conference held Wednesday, Dec. 5, at the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C.

The Obama administration said the continuing conferences, which started in 2009, fulfill its commitment to improve and expand dialogue with Indian Country and to facilitate a lasting discussion between Tribal leaders and senior federal officials.

The conference opened with a morning session that featured speeches by Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Treasury Deputy Secretary Neal Wolin, Acting Commerce Secretary Rebecca Blank, Health & Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack.

In the afternoon, conference attendees listened to reports from five breakout sessions held with Tribal leaders. The reports were followed by speeches from Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, Environmental Protection Agency Director Lisa Jackson and Labor Secretary Hilda Solis.

Wrapping up the conference was a 12-minute speech from President Barack Obama, who was re-elected to a second term during the Nov. 6 election.

"It's good to be back," Obama said. "Every year, I look forward to



Submitted photo

Tribal Council member Cheryle A. Kennedy poses with new Bureau of Indian Affairs Director Kevin Washburn during the fourth annual Tribal Nations Conference held Wednesday, Dec. 5, at the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. Kennedy has represented the Grand Ronde Tribe at all four conferences, which were started by the Obama administration has a way to improve and expand dialog with Indian Country.

this event. It is especially wonderful to see so many friends that I have gotten to know from various nations all across the country. You guys inspire me every single day."

After honoring the late Sonny Black Eagle, who adopted Obama into the Crow Nation during his 2008 presidential campaign and recently walked on, Obama listed his priorities for his second term as president regarding Native American issues.

"We've got more work to do,"

Obama said. "With domestic violence so prevalent on reservations, we're pushing Congress to restore your power to bring to justice anyone, Indian or non-Indian, who hurts a woman. With some Tribal nations unable to put their land into federal trust, we're pushing Congress to pass a Carcieri fix right away. The other focus that a lot of you have spoken to me about that we're now really trying to drill down on is expanding economic opportunity for Native Americans."

Obama touted his administration's increased support for Tribal colleges and universities so that

Tribal young people can obtain the skills and knowledge they need to have a career. He also stressed strengthening Tribal health care and giving more sovereignty to Tribes to make decisions affecting their land.

"But we've got more work to do," he said, adding that Congress needs to increase support for Native businesses which, in turn, will improve Tribal economies that are located mostly in rural areas.

"That's where we need to go ... that's the future we need to build," Obama said. "And I've never been more hopeful about our chances. Part of that hopefulness is because

I've gotten to know so many of you and I know the skills, talent and dedication, and the values and the wisdom that you all represent.

"Over the next four years, as long as I have the privilege to be your president, we're going to keep working together so that the promise of America is fully realized for every Native American."

Swinomish (Wash.) Tribal Chair Brian Cladoosby introduced Obama to conference attendees, saying that the last four years have been the best for Native Americans in the country's history.

During the Dec. 11 Legislative Action Committee, Kennedy said that she participated in the government-to-government breakout session, which discussed the Office of Management and Budget and the authority it has over Tribes. She suggested seeking a way to exempt sovereign Tribal nations from that office.

Kennedy said she also asked that programs for Tribes also be exempt from possible sequestration — forced budgetary reductions starting on Jan. 1 — should Congress and President Obama not reach a deal on the so-called "fiscal cliff."

Kennedy also asked that all federal agencies be examined to ensure they all have instituted Tribal consultation policies in keeping with an executive order issued by Obama early in his first term.

Lastly, Kennedy asked that Tribal historic land bases be compiled and that the Bureau of Indian Affairs examine what land Tribes currently have, what their ceded lands are and to look at the treaties "with attention paid to Terminated Tribes."

The annual Tribal Nations Conference invited representatives from the 566 federally recognized American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native villages. ■

Bernando teaches Wawa

Tribal member Eric Bernando teaches Chinuk Wawa language classes from 5:30 to 8:20 p.m. Wednesday at the Portland office, 4445 S.W. Barbur Blvd., Suite 101. For more information, contact Bernando at Chinuk-Wawa@gmail.com or at 503-709-3017. ■

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