

Mercier attends White House Tribal Nations Conference

By Dean Rhodes
Smoke Signals editor

Tribal Council member Chris Mercier attended the seventh annual White House Tribal Nations Conference held Thursday, Nov. 5, at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center in Washington, D.C., and walked away wondering what federal government relationships with Native American will be like under the next administration.

“Obama will be a hard act to follow in terms of the attention he has given Indian Country,” Mercier said. “Whether it’s Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders or Ben Carson or Donald Trump, I cannot picture any of them pulling off what he did today.”

Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell delivered the opening remarks to start the conference. Later in the day, the first of three “armchair sessions” featured Jewell along with Oneida Chairwoman Cristina Danforth, Acting Deputy Secretary of Education John King, Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates and Cecelia Munoz, director of the White House Domestic Policy Council.

Munoz received applause when she said she has attended all seven Tribal Nations conferences. With an eye toward the end of the Obama administration in 2017, she said the administration is trying to institutionalize its improved government-to-government relationships to Tribal nations.

“I have watched this grow,” Munoz said. “I hope none of you are hearing for the first time how much the president values the nation-to-nation collaboration. It is a high standard to which he holds us and himself. ... We are thinking a lot about how to institutionalize what we have been able to accomplish. That is part of the conversation we have to have at this conference. It is tremendously important that the progress we have made does not stop when none of us are in these positions anymore. We are really committed to making sure we institutionalize this way of working together.”

The second armchair session included Chickasaw Nation Lt. Gov. Jefferson Keel, Secretary of Labor Thomas Perez, Small Business



Photo by Chris Mercier

President Barack Obama sat down and talked with five Tribal youth during the seventh annual White House Tribal Nations Conference held Thursday, Nov. 5, in Washington, D.C. Tribal youth, from left, were Jude Schimmel, Tatiana Ticknor, Braden White, Blossum Johnson and Phillip Douglas. The Tribal youth conversation was one of the highlights of the all-day event.

Administration Administrator Maria Contreras-Sweet and Office of Personnel Management Director Beth Cobert.

The third session featured Tanana Chiefs Conference President Victor Joseph, Deputy Secretary of the Interior Michael Connor, White House Council on Environmental Policy Director Christie Goldfuss and John Holden, Obama’s chief science adviser.

Topics discussed during the conference were wide-ranging, from addressing Native American teen suicide through the educational system, drug trafficking and drug abuse on Native Reservations, ending homelessness in Tribal communities, consultation with Native Tribes, assistance for Tribal veterans who want to start their own business, the effect of climate change on Native Tribes, particularly those in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, and many others.

During the conference, President Barack Obama announced that Adidas is now offering high schools nationwide free design resources for those that want to shelve their Native mascots, nicknames, imagery or symbolism. The German company, which has North American headquarters in Portland, also pledged to provide financial support to ensure the cost of changing mascots is not prohibitive.

“For Adidas to make that commitment, it’s a very smart thing to do,” Obama said. “Because these schools now really don’t have an excuse. What they’re saying is one of the top sports companies in the world, one of the top brands in the world, is prepared to come and use all their expertise to come up with something that’s really going to work; and that the entire community can feel proud of and can bring people together and give a fresh start.”

Obama also took a subtle swipe at the professional football team located in Washington, D.C., which has refused to change its mascot.

“We all need to do more to make sure that our young people feel supported and respected, and that includes our professional sports

teams,” Obama said.

One of the highlights of the conference was when Obama sat down with five Tribal youth for an armchair session after his official remarks.

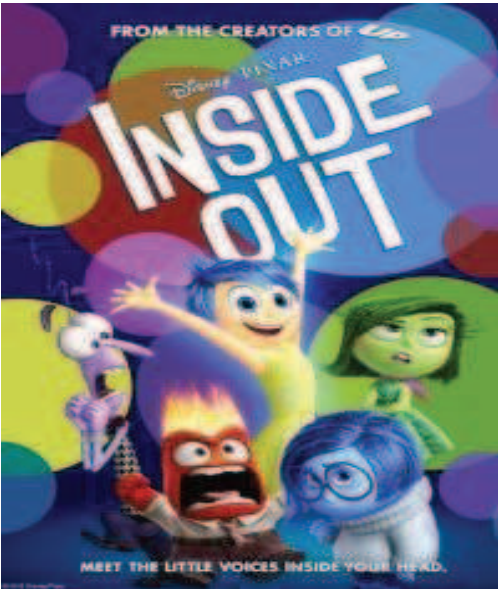
Tribal youth were Tatiana Tichnor (Tlingit/Yupik/Dena’ina), Braden White (St. Regis Mohawk), Blossum Johnson (Navajo), Phillip Douglas (Seminole Nation of Oklahoma) and Jude Schimmel (Umatilla).

“When we talk about the future of Indian Country, we’re really talking about the future of young people,” Obama said. “I don’t have to tell you the enormous challenges that they face. Native children are far more likely to grow up in poverty, suffer from significant health problems and face obstacles in educational opportunities. A lot of the young people I have met have gone through more than anybody should have to go through in an entire lifetime at a very early age.”

Obama acknowledged that many of the problems faced by Tribal youth are the results of centuries of systematic discrimination, but he added that his administration supports Tribal youth to succeed in the future by holding the inaugural White House Tribal Youth Gathering following the launch of Generation Indigenous – an initiative aimed at improving the lives of Native youth and empowering the next generation of Native leaders.

“The youth panel was awesome,” Mercier said, who was attending his second consecutive White House Tribal Nations Conference representing the Grand Ronde Tribe.

A video of the Tribal Nations Conference can be viewed at <https://www.doi.gov/live>. ■



DATE: NOVEMBER 20TH 2015
TIME: 6:00pm
PLACE: Tribal Gym

INSIDE OUT PG 102 minutes
Emotions run wild in the mind of a little girl who is uprooted from her peaceful life in the Midwest and forced to move to San Francisco in this Pixar adventure from director Pete Docter (Up, Monsters Inc.). Young Riley was perfectly content with her life when her father landed a new job in San Francisco, and the family moved across the country. Now, as Riley prepares to navigate a new city and attend a new school, her emotional headquarters becomes a hot bed of activity. As Joy (voice of Amy Poehler) attempts to keep Riley feeling happy and positive about the move, other emotions like Fear (voice of Bill Hader), Anger (voice of Lewis Black), Disgust (voice of Mindy Kaling) and Sadness (Phyllis Smith) make the transition a bit more complicated. Author: Jason Buchanan

Thank you for respecting Grand Ronde Community & Culture by not displaying gang affiliation and by not bringing drugs, alcohol or weapons to this event.

FAMILY MOVIE NIGHT

Our dessert this month will be PIE!

We will have awesome door prizes.

We have family door prizes too!

NO SMOKING
WITH IN 10 FEET OF ENTRANCE OF BUILDING, PLEASE DISPOSE OF CIGARETTE BUTTS SAFELY AND PROPERLY

YOUTH PREVENTION
Lisa Leno 503-8791471
Shannon Stanton 503-879-1489
Cristina Lara 503-879-2040
Andrea Verduzco 503-879-2162



S.E.L.F

A Trauma Informed Group Curriculum

Every Tuesday 5:30-7:00
Community Center Building
Conference Room- East Entrance

Contact:
Anne Falla @ 503-879-1660

A domestic and sexual violence support group focusing on survivors of trauma and their journeys to emotional and psychological wellness.