

ed at ATNI Winter Convention

in Indian Country, especially our missing and murdered women.”

In August, the Department of the Interior launched a series of work sessions in Indigenous communities across the United States called “Reclaiming Our Native Communities.” This resulted in a Nov. 26 proclamation that established a Department of the Interior and Department of Justice joint task force nicknamed “Operation Lady Justice.” Its intent is to work with Tribal leaders to develop new protocols on how to handle cases of missing and murdered women in Indian Country, re-examine data gaps and create a “cold case” team to look into unsolved cases.

“Assistant Secretary Sweeney wanted me to convey that all of these sessions helped her to understand the critical need for secure holding facilities on Tribal lands and more trauma-informed training,” Cruz said.

Other Monday activities included a natural resources panel, National Congress of American Indians report and White House intergovernmental affairs presentation.

On Tuesday, Jan. 28, Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler gave opening remarks to start the day.

“It’s my fourth year at ATNI and I look forward to continuing to cultivate meaningful government-to-government relationships,” he said. “It is critical for our mutual success. Our city can serve as a valuable ally to Native communities, and we can never forget the adverse policies that impacted Native peoples, and we must work to reverse those.”

Wheeler highlighted the city’s Tribal Relations program and liaison Laura John (Blackfeet/Seneca), who began her job more than two years ago to help develop Tribal relationships.

In November 2019, the city hosted its second annual Tribal Nations Summit. The event date was chosen in conjunction with November being Native American Heritage Month. Leaders from



Bureau of Indian Affairs Regional Director Bryan Mercier speaks on the second day of the annual Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Winter Convention on Tuesday, Jan. 28. Mercier is a Grand Ronde Tribal member.

2020 Outlook

- Fee to Trust Roundtable tomorrow afternoon
- President’s Budget in February
- BIA Vancouver office opening in the spring/summer
- Northwest Regional BIA Summit
- BIA appropriations through September 30
 - Public Law 116-94 signed on December 20, 2019
 - NWRO currently awaiting final distribution
- Federal elections on November 3
- NCAI in Portland November

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seven Northwest Tribes, including Grand Ronde, attended the two-day summit, along with hundreds of city employees.

“Our Tribal work is widespread and we are deeply committed to this work,” Wheeler said. “And we back our words with actions.”

Bureau of Indian Affairs Regional Director and Grand Ronde Tribal member Bryan Mercier gave a brief presentation about what has happened since he was appointed to the position in late 2018.

This summer, he is hoping to expand BIA services by opening a Vancouver, Wash., office.

“I’ve been losing people because of the commute to Portland,” he said. “To recruit and retain people, and offer services to those who live in the Vancouver area, I need an office there.”

Mercier also touched on the upcoming presidential budget, fee-to-trust discussions, BIA carryover funds, real estate services, and environmental and cultural resource management.

“Our forestry program is one of

the largest in the country and we are very active in fire management,” he said.

Other Tuesday activities included an update from the Bonneville Power Administration, the National Indian Child Welfare Association and on Tribal solar power efforts.

On Wednesday, Jan. 29, Mercier took the podium again as moderator for the Hatfield Fellowship program panel.

The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde established the Mark O. Hatfield Fellowship in 1998 as a tribute to honor his accomplishments as an Oregon governor and U.S. senator. Each year, Spirit Mountain Community Fund sponsors a Native American to serve as the Hatfield Fellow and intern in a congressional office for eight months.

Placement of the fellow traditionally rotates through the Oregon congressional delegation to enhance the mutual understanding between leadership in Washington, D.C., and Indian Country.

“This program has been extraordinarily successful and a number of fellows have helped pass legislation that is beneficial to Indian Country,” Mercier said. “We want to get the word out to recruit the next cadre of young professionals to fill this role. Also, this program should exist in other states with other Tribes.”

Past fellows who participated in the panel discussion also included Direlle Calica (Warm Springs), Shana Radford (Nez Perce), Mary Bodine (Warm Springs), Bodie Shaw (Warm Springs), Robert Ahern (Warm Springs) and Traven

Joseph (Koyokon Athabaskan/Gros-Ventre).

Spirit Mountain Community Fund Executive Director Michael Cherry and Grants Coordinator Angela Sears also attended and staffed a booth in the convention area.

Mercier queried the panelists on topics such as their biggest accomplishments while working in the Capitol, most rewarding aspects of being a fellow and what was memorable.

Answers ranged from helping to pass legislation that directly affected Indian Country, attending the State of the Union address, opening day at the Museum of the American Indian and serving on Capitol Hill immediately after the 9-11 terrorist attacks.

“It was a unique experience to be on the hill right after 9-11,” Shaw said. “You had the creation of Homeland Security, the anthrax scare and a very somber State of the Union. I was told I didn’t have to do the fellowship that year because of everything going on, but I am very appreciative that I did.”

Other topics discussed on Wednesday included Census 2020 information, a natural resources summit, a report from Native American Political Director Theresa Sheldon (Tulalip) and the opportunity to attend a Portland Trail Blazers game.

The convention wrapped up on Thursday, Jan. 30, with resolutions that will be forwarded to the National Congress of American Indians for consideration. In addition, Tribal Council Secretary Jon A. George was elected to ATNI’s Executive Board as third vice president, becoming the only Oregon Tribal delegate on the board.

The NCAI conference will be held at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland from Nov. 8-13, 2020. ■



Spirit Mountain Community Fund Director Michael Cherry, center, and Program Coordinator Angela Sears introduce the Hatfield Fellowship panel on the third day of the annual Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Winter Convention on Wednesday, Jan. 29.