

'I thought of our ancestors and the sacrifices that they made'

SUMMIT continued
from front page

tial Cabinet in the country's history as head of the Interior Department, she had to deliver her opening remarks remotely after contracting COVID-19.

"In three years, we've made big, challenging and transformative accomplishments, all with representation from all of you," she said. "This is our third year in office and now things look very different, because we have taken your words and feedback and put them into action."

Cherry also watched Biden sign an executive order to increase Indian Country access to business capital and listened to a drug use and mental health panel discussion that included White House Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Rahul Gupta, Deputy Secretary of Health & Human Services Andrea Palm, Associate Attorney General Vanita Gupta, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community President Martin Harvier and Lummi Nation Chairman Tony Hillaire.

"It's hard work to heal the wrongs of the past and change the course and move forward," Biden said during his address to Tribal leaders. "But the actions we are taking today are key steps into that new era of Tribal sovereignty and self-determination – a new era grounded in dignity and respect that recognizes your fundamental



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Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and Tribal Council Secretary Michael Cherry met at the third annual White House Tribal Nations Summit during President Joseph R. Biden's first term on Thursday, Dec. 7, in Washington, D.C. During the two-day summit, senior administration officials heard from Tribal leaders and had conversations about the most important issues facing Tribal communities.

rights to grow and govern on your own terms. That's what this summit is all about."

During the summit, Haaland announced the Biden administration's commitment to strengthen the nation-to-nation relationship with Tribal Nations, including new efforts to increase Tribal co-stewardship of lands and waters, incor-

porate Indigenous knowledge into the department's work, and preserve and protect sacred sites around the country.

"Since time immemorial, the Earth's lands and waters have been central to the social, cultural, spiritual, mental and physical wellbeing of Indigenous peoples," Haaland said. "It is essential that we do everything we can to ensure the Indigenous knowledge helps guide our ongoing work as stewards of public lands and waters."

"By acknowledging and empowering Tribes as partners in co-stewardship of our country's lands and waters, every American will benefit from strengthened management of our federal land and resources."

During previous White House Tribal Nations Summits held during the Obama administration, the Grand Ronde Tribe was regularly represented by Tribal Council Vice Chair Chris Mercier.

There were no Tribal Nations Summits held during the Trump administration.

The White House Tribal Nations Summit is designed to give administration officials and Tribal leaders from the 574 federally recognized Tribes in the United States an opportunity to discuss ways the

federal government can invest in and strengthen relationships, as well as ensure progress in Indian Country.

"I am honored to have represented the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde at the White House Tribal Nations Summit this year," Cherry said. "I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and thankfulness for the opportunity to be present at this momentous occasion. It was a humbling experience to not only witness the collective power of Tribal leaders coming together to advocate for their communities, but to also witness the President of the United States signing an executive order reaffirming his commitment to support Tribal Nations was awe-inspiring."

"The summit had not only provided a platform for dialogue, but it was also a reminder for all Tribal citizens that our voices matter and that together we can create a brighter future for our communities. Leaving the summit, I carried with me a renewed sense of hope and determination, and my heart is full of gratitude. I thought of our ancestors and the sacrifices that they made for all of us to be there. It really is a testament to the unwavering and resilient spirit of Indigenous people."

To watch a video of the Tribal Nations Summit, visit the Department of the Interior's YouTube page at [youtube.com/watch?v=OZID-N9OmuxM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZID-N9OmuxM). ■

Cancellation affects Grand Ronde and Siletz Tribes

SERVICE continued
from front page

didn't think it would happen that suddenly but knew it was coming."

Tillamook's lack of resources, including enough drivers, was behind the abrupt route cancellation, according to Tillamook County Transportation District General Manager Brian Vitulli.

"At this time, I am making the difficult decision to sacrifice Route 60X, a crucial transit service that provides a vital need to your communities, in order to sustain the services that are critical to the Tillamook County service area," he said in an email.

One job advertisement for a bus driver has been posted to the transportation district's website for nearly a year and another for more than two years.

"From our side, it's really hard to cancel a service like this," Vitulli said. "This was a route that was doing really well but we are so low on drivers, we were faced with making cuts system-wide."

The route cancellation affects the Grand Ronde and Siletz Tribes. Route 60X had a monthly ridership of 1,398, an increase of 48.5 percent from the previous year, as reported in the September 2023 transportation district ridership numbers.

The Tribe receives transportation funding from the Federal Transit Administration and the state, as

required by law, and uses this funding to pay for transit contracts. However, Vitulli noted that distance, effort and operating costs for the service were behind cancelling bus route 70X, which had lower ridership than 60X.

The Federal Transit Administration has a Public Transportation on Indian Reservations Program. In neighboring Washington, for example, the Cowlitz Reservation has an agreement with C-Tran, Clark County's public transit system.

Mercier is considering a temporary service agreement with Yamhill County, which would only require an amendment to the current agreement. However, he said another option is to hire a private bus service contractor approved by ODOT short-term, allowing Akana time to complete its professional survey regarding the new service contract.

"Route 60X is a highly utilized route," Mercier said. "Cherriots (Salem's mass transit program) is interested. It's time to negotiate."

Riders should expect bus service from Grand Ronde to Salem to return in the near future, Mercier added. Meanwhile, Tribal members and Tribal Elders have access to private Tribal transportation for medical appointments and other services.

For more information regarding those options, call the Community Health Department at 503-879-2078. ■



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