



## The Navajo Nation Council — Office of the Speaker

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## Navajo delegation attend White House Tribal Nations Conference with U.S. President Barack Obama

*Meeting marked largest, most attended gathering of tribal leaders in U.S. history*

**WASHINGTON** – It was a historic day as tribal leaders representing a majority of the 564 federally recognized tribes in the United States converged onto Washington D.C. for the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual White House Tribal Nations Conference with U.S. President Barack Obama on Nov. 4 as part of his outreach efforts to the First American People.

A Navajo delegation attended the meeting, a meeting that marked the largest and most attended gathering of tribal leaders in the history of the United States.

The Honorable Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan led a Navajo delegation that included Council Delegates Hope MacDonald Lone Tree (Coalmine Canyon/Toh Nanees Dizi) and Lawrence R. Platero (Tohajilee). Navajo Vice President Ben Shelly was also in attendance.

The conference provided tribal leaders the opportunity to directly interact and voice their concerns with President Obama and high ranking representatives in his Administration.

Speaker Morgan was thankful for the opportunity to be invited to the meeting.

“It is an honor to unite here with President Obama for this gathering to discuss pressing issues Indian Country is facing today,” Speaker Morgan said. “This is truly a historic-making event, I am glad to be part of it and I am humbled to be here representing the Great Navajo Nation.”

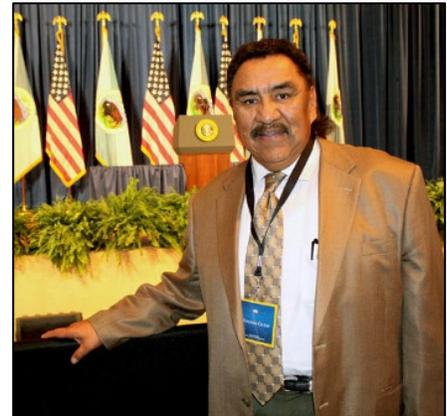
The Navajo Code Talkers provided the posting of colors before opening remarks were given by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar.

“Thank you for all being here,” Salazar said. “Every tribe is here today because President Barack Obama respects the sovereignty of Indian Nations and he believes the federal government must honor its commitments to American Indians and Alaskan Native communities.”

Shortly after Salazar’s welcoming remarks, President Obama took the stage and was warmly welcomed by tribal leaders.



Top photo: President Barack Obama addresses tribal leaders during the 1<sup>st</sup> Annual White House Tribal Nations Conference Nov. 4. Right photo: Navajo Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan. (Photos by Christian Bigwater)



"I understand what it means to be on the outside looking in," President Obama said to the tribal leaders. "I know what it means to feel ignored and forgotten and what it means to struggle -- so you will not be forgotten as long as I am in this White House."

"Today's summit is not lip service," President Obama added. "We're not going to go through the motions and pay tribute to one another and then furl up the flags and go our separate ways."

With strong statements supporting Indian Country, President Obama signed a memorandum directing every Cabinet agency to produce a detailed plan of how tribal consultation can be improved within 90 days.

Following the signing of the memorandum, President Obama allowed time for a Q&A session with tribal leaders. Most questions and concerns centered on how the U.S. government can better assist the needs of tribes, issues ranged from problems with education, to healthcare and to the negative impacts of the downward spiraling economy.

A major general sentiment amongst tribal leaders was the U.S. government's forgotten commitments and promises to Indian tribes across the United States, which drew complaints and frustration amongst the tribal leaders.

President Obama listened to the concerns expressed by the tribal leaders, but left for another meeting. He was not scheduled for the entire forum, but he did return later in the day to give closing remarks.

Secretary Salazar facilitated the discussions, which included economic development, natural resources, public safety, housing, education, health and labor. High level representatives from the Obama Administration were also on hand to answer questions from tribal leaders.

A highlight of the conference came from U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu who encouraged Indian Tribes with his commitment to partner in support of developing clean energy projects on tribal lands with the goal of reducing energy use, limiting carbon pollution and of creating job opportunities for tribal communities across the country.

"The Department of Energy is committed to partnering with tribal communities to help them meet their energy needs," Chu said. "Clean energy projects will create jobs and economic opportunities on tribal lands, while reducing energy use and increasing energy security for Indian Country."

President Obama reassured his commitment to Indian Country during his closing remarks.

"I want to give you my solemn guarantee that this is not the end of a process, but a beginning of a process and that we are going to follow up," President Obama said. "Every single member of my team understands that this is a top priority for us and I want you to know that, as I said this morning, this is not something that we just give lip service to. We are going to keep on working with you to make sure that the First Americans get the best possible chances in life in a way that's consistent with your extraordinary traditions and culture and values."

Conference panelists included: Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, Labor Secretary Hilda Solis, HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius, Energy Secretary Steven Chu, Education Secretary Arne Duncan, Deputy Attorney General David Ogden, Commerce Secretary Gary Locke, HUD Deputy Secretary Ronald Sims, DHS Deputy Secretary Jane Lute, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Associate Attorney General Tom Perrelli, and Indian Health Service Director Dr. Yvette Robideaux.

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