



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

January 18, 2017

Dear Tribal Leader:

As this Administration comes to a close, I want to take this opportunity on behalf of the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs¹ to thank all of you for your dedication and work to strengthen our Nation-to-Nation relationship. We have heard your voices, embraced your ideas, and implemented your solutions to ameliorate impacts that persist from long repudiated federal policies and to set a course that reflects the 21st Century goals of Tribes.

From the first days of this Administration, the Department prioritized the restoration of tribal homelands because of your advocacy. Over the past eight years more than 630,000 acres have been restored to tribes, with over 322,000 acres being placed in trust during this past year. From Alaska, where we took one small step for the Craig Tribal Association and one giant leap for all Alaska Tribes, to New Mexico, Minnesota and North Dakota – where tens of thousands of acres had been in process for years – we worked with Tribes to prioritize permanent homelands for current and future generations.

When tribal leaders unanimously advocated for improvements to our title standards, in May we amended our land-into-trust regulations accordingly. As a result of universal feedback in Tribal consultations, in November we took action pursuant to the Indian Land Consolidation Act to address liens and return over \$14 million to Tribes to purchase land within reservations. The collective work of former BIA Director Mike Black and current Director Bruce Loudermilk, as well as BIA Regional Directors and staff, have been instrumental in setting an enduring pathway to continue working to restore tribal homelands.

Today, there is nothing that gives me more optimism about our future than our Native youth. From BIE operated boarding schools like Riverside, Flandreau, Sherman and Chemawa to Tribally operated schools across Indian country, the talent, desire and pride of Native youth are evident. Under the leadership of Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes and BIE Director Tony Dearman, we have set a course with you to continue our collective work to ensure that the delivery of educational services is structured to provide Native youth the intellectual nourishment they crave and that our trust responsibility demands.

¹ The Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs includes: DAS-PED Ann Marie Bledsoe Downes (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), Chief of Staff Sarah Walters (Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe), Senior Advisor Alison Grigonis (Pokagon Band of Potawatomi), Senior Advisor Cheryl Andrews Maltais (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah)), Advisor Clint Hastings (Cherokee Nation), Senior Counselor Tana Fitzpatrick (Crow Nation), Counselor Miles Janssen (Tlingit and Haida), WHCNA Executive Director Morgan Rodman (Cherokee Nation), RACA Director Liz Appel, Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary Faith Begay (Lower Brule Sioux Tribe), Teresia Paul (Oglala Sioux Tribe), Program Analyst Rellani Ogumoro, Program Analyst Shoshana Silverstein, Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff Carol Leader Charge (Rosebud Sioux Tribe), and Staff Assistant Margie Creel (Jemez Pueblo).

Likewise, we have taken steps to address the crisis concerning the physical condition of our schools. In April, we took action to replace a building that housed the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig High School on the Leech Lake Indian Reservation and announced plans for the replacement of the next ten schools of the seventy-three that are in poor condition. With the support of so many stakeholders, you have made school replacement a bi-partisan priority.

We have worked with Indian country to provide career development opportunities for Native youth and to improve the delivery of services to Native youth and families. This summer we launched the Indian Affairs Student Leadership Summer Institute. With the assistance of Indian Affairs team, the summer internship placed Native college and graduate students with senior leadership across Indian Affairs.

We also entered into two partnerships with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to better serve Native youth. Earlier this year, we agreed to provide HHS space in BIE schools to provide mental health services. This will make it easier for students to receive services and will promote relationships between teachers and mental health professionals, who working together can proactively identify students in need of assistance before tragedy strikes. Similarly, we have partnered with HHS to develop a culturally appropriate methamphetamine prevention program for Native youth. Through the work of HHS, BIA and BIE staff, and our Indian Affairs team, this fall we launched the program on seven reservations. Native youth are learning from health professionals and members of the community about the negative impacts of meth use, as well as resources and strategies to protect themselves and their families.

Under your collective leadership, Tribes continued to prioritize action to protect Native youth and we listened. Building off of the work started under Assistant Secretary Washburn, in June we issued final regulations to implement the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). At their core, these rules promote the fundamental goal of strengthening families so that children may remain with their parents and their tribal communities. As you requested, we updated our ICWA guidelines and offered nationwide trainings to assist State and Tribal professionals to implement ICWA. Over the past few months, our team, led by Sarah Walters and Liz Appel, engaged directly with state and tribal professionals to promote a full understanding of the new rules and guidelines. Further, in April we embraced your idea of permanency for our ICWA inter-agency work with the Department of Justice and Health and Human Services by entering into a Memorandum of Agreement to ensure continuing collaboration. Through your advocacy, our Nation-to-Nation commitment to fully implement ICWA is strong.

Together, we also took steps to prioritize cooperative management of federal lands. In October, Secretary Jewell issued Secretarial Order 3342 to promote cooperative management partnerships between Tribes and Interior agencies. Shortly thereafter, the Department entered into a cooperative management agreement with the Ahtna Inter-Tribal Resource Commission for the allocation and harvest of moose and caribou by rural residents of the Alaska Native villages in the Ahtna region on Federal public lands. Similarly, the National Park Service entered into a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Chickasaw Nation for enhanced cooperation to further the Chickasaw National Recreation Area. Finally, in designating the Bears Ears National Monument, the President announced the establishment of a Bears Ears Commission, consisting

of one elected officer each from the Hopi Nation, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah Ouray, and Zuni Tribe, to provide guidance and recommendations on the development and implementation of management plans and on management of the monument.

Our work together over the past year strengthened our Federal budget and promoted economic development. In a time of shrinking federal budgets, the President's FY2017 proposed a \$2.9 billion budget for Indian Affairs, which represented a \$137 million increase above FY2016 enacted levels. Recognizing that federal budgets are not likely to grow at a pace to meet the needs of Indian country, we pushed forward solutions from you to address taxation in Indian country by starting the rulemaking process to update the Indian trader regulations and intervening in litigation to ensure that only tribes assess taxes on activities on Indian lands. Further, dozens of Tribes have implemented their own laws pursuant to the HEARTH Act so that leasing of tribal lands is administered directly by the particular Tribe. This streamlined approach respects tribal sovereignty and provides tribes and third parties with greater certainty regarding the leasing of tribal lands.

Finally, our work together has resulted in the Federal government as a whole embracing its trust and treaty obligations. From the Department's work to settle over 100 breach of trust claims brought by Tribes to ensuring that the voices of Native Americans gathering at Standing Rock were heard, addressing issues in Indian country is viewed as every agency's responsibility. This is most recently reflected in multiple Departments coming together with tribal leaders to conduct a broader review and consultation as to how, prospectively, Federal decision-making on infrastructure projects can better allow for timely and meaningful tribal input.

It has truly been the honor of a lifetime to work with each of you over the past four years in the Office of the Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs. Thank you for your service to Indian country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lawrence S. Roberts", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lawrence S. Roberts
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs