

**DOE Tribal Summit
Secretary Steven Chu
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
Thursday, May 5, 2011
Arlington, VA**

Good morning. Thank you all for joining us today, including those of you watching online.

The Obama Administration is committed to strong engagement with Tribal Nations. As a sign of that commitment, you heard from Secretary Vilsack yesterday, and today you will also hear from Secretary Salazar, Administrator Jackson, and White House officials.

When I started as Energy Secretary, I made a commitment to hold this summit because it's important to hear directly from you about our shared energy challenges and opportunities.

The second commitment I made was to support the Department of Energy's Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs, which was established under the 2005 Energy Policy Act.

I am pleased to report that we have established this office as a stand-alone program office and appointed Tracey LeBeau as Director. I know that Tracey and her team have talked to many of you to get your input on how we can work together better. We look forward to continuing this conversation today and in the months and years ahead.

I want to start by saying clearly – I take the Department of Energy's responsibilities and commitments to sovereign Tribal Nations very seriously. We are fully committed to our Tribal policy and to early and meaningful consultation with American Indian Tribal governments and Alaska Natives on a government-to-government basis.

We are also committed to strengthening federal-tribal relationships to protect tribal rights and interests, including treaty rights, to promoting tribal sovereignty and self sufficiency, and to addressing concerns immediately as they arise. I expect no less from my management team, staff, and contractors, both at headquarters and in the field.

As you may know, the Department's missions touch Indian Country in many ways: the clean-up legacy of 50 years of weapons production from the Manhattan Project; the continuing defense, security and nuclear missions; essential research, science and technology missions; and energy development, efficiency, and security.

The Department operates more than 20 research laboratories and facilities, and manages two million acres in communities across the country, some in the heart of Indian Country.

I'm particularly sensitive to the fact that several Tribal Nations are neighbors to the Department's National Laboratories, sites, and facilities. And I am aware of the serious Tribal concerns about some of these facilities.

The Department has significant involvement with Tribal Nations near these sites and we are committed to strengthening this relationship. That is why, during a visit to the Hanford site in Washington State, I met with Tribal leaders to get their input firsthand on the work there.

Through the Recovery Act, we invested \$6 billion to accelerate the clean-up of our Cold War environmental legacy. We are on track to shrink the footprint of our clean-up sites by more than 40 percent this year.

This is just one element of our relationship with Tribal nations. The breadth of our operations provides both an obligation and opportunity for the Department: an obligation to include American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in our decision-making processes, and an opportunity to improve quality of life through business opportunities and participation in our energy programs.

To fully address our economic and energy security challenges, Indian Country must have a seat at the table.

We have heard from many Tribal leaders that energy development is critical for your future.

For example, in 2009, I saw firsthand the unique challenges facing Alaska Native communities. One village had to bring in diesel fuel to run generators that were its only source of electricity. But I also saw many innovative projects, including a highly energy efficient school and a new rural wind turbine.

Clean energy holds enormous potential for our citizens. By moving to a clean energy future, we can reduce energy bills, expand energy access, strengthen our security, and save our planet. And clean energy is one of our greatest opportunities for creating jobs.

That is why President Obama has made a historic investment in clean energy.

We're weatherizing hundreds of thousands of homes, making our vehicles and appliances more energy efficient, and developing ways to dramatically reduce energy waste in buildings.

We are investing in the next generation of innovative clean energy technologies, from thin film solar power to advanced biofuels to carbon capture and sequestration. And we're sponsoring research and development with the goal of bringing down the levelized cost of renewable energies so they are cost-competitive with any other form of energy.

As we move to a clean energy future, we will still rely on conventional sources of energy, like oil and gas. The development of these resources has – and will continue to be – important to many Tribes. But in addition to these resources, Tribal lands have some of the greatest potential for clean energy.

The Department's National Renewable Energy Lab recently updated its estimates of renewable energy generation potential on Tribal lands. These estimates, which they have also mapped, can help identify the best opportunities to develop renewable energy.

For example, the lab estimates that the wind potential in Indian Country could provide 32 percent of U.S. annual electric generation. Solar energy potential in Indian Country is twice the total amount of electricity the U.S. generates per year. There are also tremendous opportunities for biomass, geothermal, and hydro power.

By working together, we can promote economic development and help many more tribes and villages seize the clean energy opportunity.

Since 2002, the Department of Energy Tribal Energy Program has invested a total of \$30 million in 129 Tribal clean energy projects. This includes weatherization training, feasibility studies, and the deployment of renewable energy and energy efficiency measures. We have also held workshops to discuss financing options for renewable and efficiency projects.

Additionally, the Recovery Act included \$54 million for Tribes through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. These funds have supported more than 400 projects ranging from energy upgrades in buildings to the development of conservation strategies to the deployment of on-site renewable energy systems.

For example, the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma built a state-of-the-art recycling center and the Oglala Lakota Tribe has created a training program so workers have the skills they need to perform energy audits and weatherize homes.

As we move forward, the Department also seeks to support more distributed generation and community-scale energy projects when possible.

To develop renewable energy sources and to promote economic development for tribes, we need better transmission infrastructure. Over the past year, the Department's Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability held listening sessions with tribal leaders to discuss electrification issues. In addition, through the Recovery Act, we've invested \$3.4 billion to modernize our nation's electric grid, which will ultimately help Tribes get connected faster.

We're also pursuing potentially revolutionary approaches to large-scale batteries. These batteries could eventually store enough power to supply a village. This could someday mean that villages that are not connected to the grid could have reliable electricity through their own solar and wind power.

Finally, we are helping to educate the next generation of scientists and engineers who can discover new energy solutions. Our Office of Science offers a number of educational opportunities for Tribal students.

As the Recovery Act winds down and we continue to tighten our fiscal belt, the challenge will be to find new ways to keep this momentum going. Even in this time of austerity, President Obama is committed to investing in areas, like clean energy, that are critical to economic growth.

To enhance our collaboration on clean energy issues, today I am announcing that we will form an Indian Clean Energy and Infrastructure Working Group. This group will provide feedback to the Department, so we can better facilitate clean energy development on Tribal lands. We will have more details on this in the coming weeks.

Lastly, to encourage Tribal renewable energy production, the Department plans to develop guidance for exercising our authorities under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to give preference to Indian tribes when DOE facilities contract to purchase renewable energy products or by products, pursuant to the Act's parameters.

By working together on energy issues, we can grow our economies and create good jobs, while increasing our security and protecting our planet.

I want to leave you with some words from a Native American proverb that is probably familiar to you and that reflects the stakes of the energy challenge before us: "Treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents; it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors; we borrow it from our Children."

Thank you again for joining us today. I look forward to a productive conversation. With that, I welcome your questions.

###