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MASHPEE WAMPANOAG GO TO WASHINGTON

Mashpee tribe members attend White House Tribal Nations Conference

Washington, D.C. – A delegation of Mashpee Wampanoag tribe members led by Tribal Council Chairman Cedric Cromwell attended the White House Tribal Nations Conference Wednesday (Dec. 3) to advocate on behalf of tribal community development.

“I am honored to be here along with leaders from 565 other federally-recognized Native nations to advocate on behalf of the needs of our people in Mashpee and across Indian Country. Many of the issues we are dealing with in Mashpee – housing, health care, economic development, protecting tribal lands – are pressing issues for Native people throughout Indian Country,” Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council Chairman Cedric Cromwell said.

A range of Native issues were discussed during the conference that highlighted Native youth. Mashpee Wampanoag youth leader Brian Weeden attended the conference, representing not only Mashpee tribal youth, but Native youth, as the United National Indian Tribal Youth (UNITY) Executive Committee Co-President and the National Congress of American Indians Youth Commission Co-Vice President. Weeden participated in breakout sessions, panel discussions, and leadership development programs as part of the first ever White House Tribal Youth Gathering.

However, of central concern were steps that could be taken to enhance tribal sovereignty, treaties and trust responsibilities, as well as the need for tribes to get better access to capital and credit.

On the latter, Cromwell was invited to brief Senate Finance Committee staff Tuesday (Dec. 2) afternoon on the need for legislative action so that a bigger share of existing tax credit programs and financing for community development flows into Indian Country.

“Indian Country needs better access to financing as we build our tribal economies. Right now, tribes are being left out and left behind when it comes to financing large capital initiatives,” Cromwell said.

Specifically, Cromwell urged the Senate Finance Committee to push for legislation that would expand tax credits for tribal Community Development Entities (CDEs) to help spur investments in tribal economic development projects.

Cromwell said that not enough of the new markets tax credit program - established by Congress in 2000 as an incentive for investors to locate projects in low-income communities - has gone to tribal communities, noting that in the last two funding cycles (2013 and 2014) no tax credit allocations went to tribal community development organizations.

“We encourage the Administration to revise a CDE's service area to include Indian Country. Moreover, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund should amend their definition of ‘rural’ to include Indian Country, as done by other agencies such as the Departments of Agriculture and Interior,” he said during the briefing.

Cromwell also talked about the need for alternative sources of collateral for tribes because of the unique status of federal Indian trust lands. “Tribal applicants are at a significant disadvantage because the preferred source of collateral is land. Given the trust status of lands, this makes using land-based collateral difficult,” Cromwell said.

“Because these issues are not well-known outside of Indian Country,” Cromwell concluded, “I am grateful for the opportunity to engage on these issues and to share our concerns. It is heartening to have been given such a responsive welcome from the White House and key Senate Finance Committee staff.”

About the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe:

The Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, known as the People of the First Light, has inhabited present day Massachusetts for more than 12,000 years. After an arduous process lasting more than three decades, the Mashpee Wampanoag were re-acknowledged as a federally recognized tribe in 2007 and retain full tribal sovereignty rights. The Mashpee tribe currently has approximately 2,600 enrolled citizens.