

[News](#)>Interior Secretary Kicks-off Native Youth Listening Tour at Salt River Elementary School



Lynette Charlie, SRES first grade teacher, and her class stopped for a selfie with U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, after the Salt River Elementary School assembly on Tuesday, February 10.

Interior Secretary Kicks-off Native Youth Listening Tour at Salt River Elementary School

By [Sheila Begay](#)

Au-Authm Action News

On Tuesday, February 10, Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Sally Jewell kicked off the Native Youth Listening Tour at Salt River Elementary School. This tour is an initiative by the Obama Administration to meet with Native youth across Indian Country in hopes of better understanding the barriers and challenges keeping Native youth from succeeding.

“When you listen to Native youth, when you listen to some of the issues that they face, it’s very clear that we need to do a better and more effective job as a federal family to better serve Native youth in particular, but Indian Country broadly. The President encouraged us to get out and speak with Native youth, to visit schools, to be with kids where they are in their home communities around the country, so that we can understand [that] what we’re doing can be helpful and what we need to do to up our game,” said Jewell.

Through the Native Youth Listening Tour, the voice of Native youth will be represented by 36 White House Youth Ambassadors. In return, these ambassadors will join tribal leaders and team up to find better solutions to help Native youth succeed.

According to the 2014 White House Native Youth Report, some of the major issues facing American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) youth are: one in three AI/AN children lives in poverty, the AI/AN high school graduation rate is 67 percent (the lowest of any ethnicity), and the suicide rate is 2.5 times the national rate in the 15-to-24-year age group. These very barriers are what the Obama Administration are recognizing as a

crisis that needs to be addressed.

“This is Secretary Sally Jewell’s first visit to the Community, and it is such an honor for her to be here, especially to come to [visit with] the children,” said SRPMIC Council Representative Deanna Scabby. “President Obama wants to make sure Native children across the country are taken care of. I’ve seen [Jewell] in different areas [across] Indian Country, and she is just so supportive. I’m really grateful that she was able to be here today. By working with other federal programs, I think it brings awareness of Native schools, [Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)] schools and education in general.”

In addition to the current efforts put forth by the Obama Administration, the DOI is also making efforts to transform the BIE. Jewell directed a restructuring of the BIE to make it better serve as a support network to schools, as opposed to being a direct education provider. Progress had been made in reaching the Obama Administration’s vision of “high-achieving tribally controlled schools.”

“The directive is ‘Go to Indian Country and listen to [Native youth.]’ Not just ‘visit’ Indian Country, but go and visit Native youth in their homes. I think that hasn’t been done in forever,” said Dr. Charles ‘Monty’ Roessel, director of the BIE. “When you go out to Indian Country and different reservations, [overall] you have a lot of different things that you’re looking at. But, when you go out into Indian Country to focus just on Native youth, that has narrowed the focus: ‘What is important to [Native youth]? What is the impact that they’re looking at? What are their lives about? What do they do on their off time? What do they do at school?’ It’s just focused on them. That type of concentration (focus) brings them different types of answers, or more importantly, different questions.”

Jewell Visits Salt River Elementary School

“Ske:g sialik,” said Jewell as she addressed SRES students, staff and faculty on February 10. After a quick introduction, Jewell elaborated on the purpose of her visit to SRES and also interacted with everyone. Students were quick to provide feedback as she asked them questions about their language, culture and future goals. SRPMIC representatives at the event included President Delbert Ray, Sr., and Council Representatives Michael Dallas, Sr., Deanna Scabby and Janelle Howard.

After enjoying a quick performance by the SRES choir, Jewell was taken on a student-led tour around the SRES campus by Community youth Christopher Manuel. Manuel is a sixth-grader who is currently the student council president at SRES.

The tour visited various classrooms and the library, learning about SRES resources and the Robotics Club. Most important, Jewell was able to sit and talk one-on-one with students during the student leadership roundtable discussion. This was restricted to Jewell, an adult monitor and students. The kids were able to discuss some of their most common problems and present their ideas as Native youth within the SRPMIC.

Explaining why the SRPMIC was her first stop on the listening tour, Jewell said, “[The SRPMIC] is a great illustration of a tribe in an urban setting, where the tribal government has chosen to become very directly involved in the health, the well-being and the education of the children of the tribe. In this particular facility, the facility was built by [SRPMIC], and the facility we were providing was inadequate. So [SRPMIC] is fortunate to have revenues, in part because they’re close to an urban area, and those revenues they reinvest in programs that help support their members, education being foremost among them. The [SRPMIC] is a model in many ways. We’re here to learn, and [SRPMIC] does a great job at sharing their [experiences] with other tribes across the country.”

After the tour came to an end, Jewell went on to visit the Gila River Crossing Community School. The listening tour will continue visiting other schools on tribal lands across the country.