



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

MAY 05 2017

Ms. Jacqueline Pata
Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians
1516 P Street, NW.
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Pata:

JACKIE,

As part of our ongoing dialogue, I am writing to make you aware that we were deeply disturbed by media mischaracterizations of Secretary Ryan Zinke's comments delivered at the National Tribal Energy Summit earlier this week. The Secretary, several Department of the Interior (Department) staff members, and I have already had conversations with several tribal leaders this week. I write to you today to let you know that we hear Indian Country's concerns, and want to set the record straight on where this Administration and Department stand on protecting and strengthening sovereignty.

As a former member of Congress and now head of the Department, the Secretary supports tribal self-determination, self-governance, and sovereignty, and believes the Federal Government should meet its trust responsibilities.

At the Summit, the Secretary made broad comments that referred to significant but sensitive moments in our Nation's history of tribal relations. He wanted to convey that he understands the continuing impacts of policies from the past and is dedicated to improving the conditions in Indian Country as the Trustee. He even emphasized that "if the Department is not value added, we should get out of the way."

At this time there are no plans to alter the Department's current management of our trust responsibilities. Without a doubt, there are many options for improvement as we work together, all of which will require detailed thought and consultation with Tribes interested in exercising a greater degree of self-governance and sovereignty.

We welcome dialogue regarding new strategies for improving our role in supporting sovereignty and providing services to Indian Country and encourage the continued involvement of tribal leaders in this important discussion. The Secretary and I look forward to continuing to work with tribal communities and welcome future discussions with tribal leaders to protect and strengthen sovereignty.

Thank you for your partnership. We look forward to the ongoing dialogue on these and many other important issues.

Sincerely,

James Cason

Delegated Authority of the Deputy Secretary