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– Chairman Ajit Pai, Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

WEDNESDAY

The Sunrise Ceremony started off Wednesday morning bright and early, with the Regional Caucus Meetings close to follow, all before the Second General Assembly.

Called to order by NCAI First Vice-President Fawn Sharp, attendees were greeted with an invocation by Seneca Nation Councilor Steve Gordon. Sharp then introduced the first morning speaker, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai.

Chairman Pai started his remarks by mentioning a six-day road trip taken from Milwaukee, WI to Casper, WY to meet with communities about their access to broadband.

“It is my duty to shed a spotlight on the isolated communities who are being left out of the digital revolution. Rural and tribal communities deserve our collective attention,” said Chairman Pai. “If you are part of the 85% of people living outside of broadband zones, you are living in a different era. We don’t bemoan the digital divide for simple games, etc.—it is about equal and full participation in modern life. Not having internet access means not being able to find jobs, store memories of culture online, consult with physicians, etc. We respect your sovereign status—and we have consulted.”

Chairman Pai told stories of the effects on communities’ due to lack of broadband, including a woman who dialed 9-1-1 a total of 38 times but the call was never placed and she passed away. “We are looking to eliminate barriers to deploying wireless in Indian Country. We want to ensure the protection of culturally significant sites,” said Chairman Pai. “I encourage you to file comments.”

He went on to discuss his research into Indian Country and reiterated his commitment to digitally empower tribal nations and protect cultural heritage.

“I come to you with humility about my role—I can only hope to have the courage and focus of the eagle. My vision is opportunity for all tribal members,” said Chairman Pai. “There are no overnight solutions—I have a literal open door, with a figurative open mind to tribal nations.” The new NCAI Policy Research Center (PRC) Director Dr. Yvette Roubideaux gave the Policy Research Center Update which transitioned to the opening of the 12th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum (TLSF).

This year’s TLSF theme was A Research Response to the Federal Policy Agenda: Navigating Infrastructure, Tax, and Health Care Reforms. The theme was inspired by the current priorities in Congress and the Administration including investment in infrastructural development, revising and simplifying the tax code, and repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act (ACA). When tribal governments engage with these policy reforms, research and data are critical to shaping future outcomes for the benefit of tribal peoples. An expert panel presented data insights from both domestic and international fronts.



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The presentations included: Economic Costs & Opportunities Lost: Tribal Infrastructural Needs in the 21st Century by Dr. Dick Todd, Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis; Why Beggar Thy Indian Neighbor? The Case for Tribal Primacy in Taxation in Indian Country by Kelly S. Croman, National Intertribal Tax Alliance and Jonathan Taylor, Taylor Policy Group; A Health Economic Analysis of an ACA Repeal & Replace by Dr. Tim McBride, Washington University-St. Louis; and Te Ahi Kaa Roa: Asserting Tribal Data Sovereignty in Aotearoa Government Negotiations by Maui Hudson, University of Waikato, Aotearoa/New Zealand.

To offer tribal leader perspectives and broaden the discussion, Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation Chairwoman Liana Onnen provided the tribal leader response for the researchers and fueled the tribal leader discussion.

The tribal leader discussion centered on the theme of data collection and the need for tribal nations to effectively collect and utilize data in their own communities to better tell their story and find solutions with local, state, and federal governments.

During the lunch break a Poster Session was held in the Ballroom Foyer. A total of six research studies were presented on everything from education and graduation rates to water to infrastructure. The afternoon Concurrent Breakout Sessions continued the TLSF theme with a focus on data. Sessions ranged from data collection on shared natural resources to economic mapping to data infrastructure. Other sessions included features on taxation and tribal homeland security.

Wednesday concluded with the Mid Year Meet & Greet at the Cabaret Theater at Mohegan Sun.

THURSDAY

The Third General Assembly kicked off Thursday morning with the invocation by Mohegan Chief Lynn Malerba, followed by the Association of American Indian Affairs International Repatriation Project from Director Honor Keeler.

“Our cultural items on the private market overseas number around 1 million. Tribal leaders created a working group on international repatriation,” said Keeler. “There are four key challenges of: (1) locating ancestors and cultural items in other countries; (2) navigating the laws of each country; (3) submitting claims to each museum, auction house, etc.; and (4) influencing international and domestic policy. Cultural repatriation is a human right issue.”

Mathew Tomaskin, Legislative Liaison at Yakama Nation, was the next speaker of the morning and invigorated the crowd on the importance of Native Vote and challenged each tribe to appoint a lead.

“We are encouraging every tribe to make a Native Vote program,” said Tomaskin. “If there is a position in a city, municipality—run a Native person. They’ll move from dog catcher to county commissioner, to legislator, and pretty soon, they’re in Congress.”

The Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Update was provided by Deputy Chief Counsel Rhonda Harjo, who gave an in-depth overview of current legislation in Congress.

“The amendments to the ACA are a work in progress,” said Harjo. “We anticipate some changes from what the House sent over—it’s still prime, it’s still necessary to weigh in. We are slowly pivoting to Indian Country.”

Harjo went onto say that SCIA is anticipating nominations for the Indian Health Service Director and the Administration for Native Americans (ANA) Commissioner. SCIA is also conducting budget briefings while appropriations are going on, and they will also be focusing on narcotics, crime rates, and prosecution in the fall.

The 2018 Farm Bill Update on Regaining our Future was presented by Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, University of Arkansas School of Law Policy Director & Staff Attorney Colby Duren.



Fawn Sharp & Chairman Pai



President Cladoosby & Chairman Pai



Dr. Roubideaux & TLSF Panel



TLSF Presenter Maui Hudson



TLSF Tribal Leader Response



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“We believe the 2018 Farm Bill holds incredible opportunity for Indian Country—for food security, but also economic development and infrastructure,” said Duren. “The 2018 Farm Bill will probably be the last farm bill as we know it.”

The Tribal Supreme Court Update was presented by the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) Executive Director John Echohawk and NCAI General Counsel John Dossett.

Dossett started off his presentation with the exciting announcement regarding the win by the Standing Rock and Cheyenne River Sioux Tribes in a Supreme Court decision made just the day before, which was excitedly met with applause by the audience. Read more about the decision here: [“Standing Rock Claims Confirmed – Justice Demands Tribes Rights are Respected”](#).

The Third General Assembly concluded with Committee Reports and the voting NCAI Membership approving 36 total resolutions, including MOH-17-053 “Continued Support for the Paris Climate Agreement and Action to Address Climate Change” which was commemorated by a photograph of NCAI Members, tribal leaders, and attendees. Read more about the resolution here: [“Tribal Leaders Vote on Resolution Supporting the Paris Climate Agreement at NCAI Mid Year”](#).



All text of the resolutions will be available on the NCAI website starting next week at <http://www.ncai.org/resources/resolutions-home>. To access copies of the presentations given during the 2017 NCAI Mid Year Conference & Marketplace visit the NCAI 2017 Mid Year app to download. Don't see your presentation? Email NCAIPress@ncai.org.

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TLSF Poster Session



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Mathew Tomaskin



Colby Duren



Closing Color Guard