

Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation



PRESS RELEASE

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Gov. Kotek and First Lady Visit CTUIR

MISSION – The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) on Thursday, April 25, welcomed Gov. Tina Kotek and First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson for a visit that included a ceremonial signing of a bill calling for Oregon and Washington states to collaboratively resolve water issues facing the Walla Walla River.

Kotek and the First Lady began the day at the Nixyáawii Governance Center for an invocation and welcome reception from the Board of Trustees (Board) and CTUIR staff.

“We are honored by Gov. Tina Kotek and the First Lady’s visit to the Umatilla Indian Reservation,” CTUIR Chairman Gary I. Burke said. “Gov. Kotek has shown us that she is fulfilling her promise to learn in-depth about each of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon such that she and her administration can more effectively work with us as distinct, individual sovereign governments. We thank Gov. Kotek, the First Lady and her staff for taking the time to learn more about the Confederated Tribes, our tribal sovereignty, our treaty rights and the work we are doing here in Eastern Oregon and throughout our traditional use areas.”

Kotek’s visit was part of her commitment to meet with Oregon’s nine federally recognized sovereign tribal nations in 2024.

“Today’s visit with CTUIR was about strengthening our knowledge of the tribe’s unique history,” she said. “The tribe is working on some exciting, innovative initiatives and the state of Oregon is ready to support the good work of CTUIR however we can. I’d like to thank Chairman Burke, the Board of Trustees and all members of CTUIR for the hospitality they’ve shown us as we’ve listened and learned in their community.”

The welcome was followed by a private meeting with the Board to discuss CTUIR priorities and issues such as housing, energy, broadband expansion, health, water rights, treaty rights and regenerative agriculture, as well as fostering cooperation between the CTUIR and state.

Kotek and the First Lady then met with Yellowhawk Tribal Health Center officials as they toured the facility before sitting down to discuss behavioral health and public health issues.

Following the Yellowhawk tour, the governor and First Lady traveled to Thorn Hollow Bridge, which collapsed and was rendered inoperable during record-breaking floods on the Umatilla Indian Reservation in 2020. The bridge served as a connection between communities, residents and emergency services.

With funding to fix the county bridge available, Kotek told CTUIR officials that her office would inquire about the bridge project's status. "So we should probably check to see where it sits in the queue for sure," she said. "We will definitely look into it."

Kotek and the First Lady then lunched at the CTUIR Immeques Fisheries Acclimation Facility and learned about the tribe's First Foods, including water, fish, big game, roots and berries. They also participated in a First Foods serving while learning about the about the reciprocity between tribal members and the First Foods upon which they depend.

The First Family then returned to the governance center for a ceremonial signing of [Senate Bill 1567](#) or the Walla Walla 2050 Strategic Plan that calls for cooperative water management between Oregon and Washington in the Walla Walla Basin to help restore salmon.

"Senate Bill 1567 represents decades of work, and it's a momentous achievement that we're celebrating today," Kotek said. "The collaboration that was needed to get to this point represents a landmark in our efforts to be sustainable stewards of the Walla Walla River Basin. And it serves as a testament to the power we have when we work together to take on complex challenges."

CTUIR Board Member at Large Lisa Ganuelas thanked the governor for supporting the bill along with Sen. Bill Hansell and Rep. Bobbie Levy for helping it pass the state Legislature.

"Today, we are here to celebrate the great honor of having Gov. Kotek as our guest. Our gratitude for your strong support and partnership with the tribes cannot be overstated. We look forward to many more occasions like this one," Ganuelas said. "We also celebrate having our friends here from Umatilla County, Sen. Bill Hansell and Rep. Bobbie Levy. Your support and leadership over the years has set an example of how strong our communities can be when we work together. This commitment to collaboration and cooperation is what has made the Umatilla a role model for basins across the region."

Following the ceremony, Kotek and the First Lady visited the Tamástslíkt Cultural Institute and took in its featured exhibit "Portraits in Red: Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women & Girls Painting Project."

Artist Nayana LaFond's painting project began in 2020 with her painting "Lauraina in RED," created for the National Day of Awareness for Missing and Murdered Native Women and Girls. Each portrait is of someone who is missing, was murdered, survived, their family member or friend, or an activist/hero fighting for the cause.

The governor and First Lady ended the day by dining with the Board at the Wildhorse Resort & Casino.

The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation is comprised of the Cayuse, Umatilla and Walla Walla Tribes, and formed under the Treaty of 1855 at the Walla Walla Valley, 12 Stat. 945. In 1949, the Tribes adopted a constitutional form of government to protect, preserve and enhance the reserved treaty rights guaranteed under federal law.

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Caption1: Gov. Tina Kotek holds up a ceremonially signed copy of Senate Bill 1567 while members of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Board of Trustees and elected state officials

applaud on Thursday, April 25, outside of the Nixyáawii Governance Center in Mission. SB 1567 or the Walla Walla 2050 Strategic Plan calls for cooperative water management between Oregon and Washington in the Walla Walla Basin to help restore salmon. Standing from left to right are Board Member at Large Lisa Ganuelas, Rep. Bobbie Levy, Sen. Bill Hansell, Board Members at Large Steven Hart and Corinne Sams, Chairman Gary I. Burke, General Council Chairman Alan Crawford and Board Vice Chairman Aaron Ashley. Lee Gavin/CTUIR

Caption2: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation Chairman Gary I. Burke chats with Gov. Tina Kotek shortly before a welcome reception on Thursday, April 25, at the CTUIR Nixyáawii Governance Center. The governor and First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson spent the day visiting the CTUIR. Lee Gavin/CTUIR

Caption3: Gov. Tina Kotek and First Lady Aimee Kotek Wilson listen to Wenix Red Elk, a public outreach/education specialist with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation's Department of Natural Resources, speak about the tribe's First Foods during a luncheon on Thursday, April 25, near Gibbon. Kotek and the First Lady visited the CTUIR as part of the governor's promise to visit each of the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon in 2024. To the left is Teara Farrow Ferman, DNR Cultural Resources Protection Program manager. Courtesy of Office of Gov. Tina Kotek