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Subject: [Lakhota] If You are Voting. . .For Your Consideration

Reznet Obama Adopted Into Crow Tribe

By Matthew Brown of The Associated Press
CROW AGENCY, Mont. (AP)—Pledging to usher in a new era of honest federal dealings with tribes, Democratic presidential front-runner Barack Obama on Monday made an unprecedented stop in Indian Country for a rally at the Crow reservation.

Obama told several thousand American Indian supporters that he would honor long-ignored treaty obligations and revamp health care and education on reservations across the United States. Such services have long suffered because of inadequate funding and the much criticized oversight of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"Few have been ignored by Washington for as long as Native Americans, the first Americans," Obama said. "That will change when I am president of the United States."

Obama said treaty commitments with Indian nations were "paramount to law" and could not be ignored when Washington makes funding decisions affecting Indian Country. He characterized the Bureau of Indian Affairs as a bureaucracy out of touch with those it serves, and said the agency needs to be shaken up so it will perform better.

"You guys pay taxes too. You deserve to get decent services from Washington," he told the crowd in Crow Agency, Mont.

Earlier, in a private ceremony, the candidate was adopted into the Black Eagle family of the tribe under the name Awe Kooda Bilaxpak Kuuxshish, or "One Who Helps People Throughout the Land."

Crow Vice Chairman Cedric Black Eagle said a purification ceremony was performed in which the candidate faced east — the source of new life — and was prayed over by his adopted father, Hartford Black Eagle.

Tribal representatives from across Montana said it was the first time such a high-profile candidate had appeared on one of the state's reservations. The closest precedent, they said, was a visit to the Crow Reservation by first lady Lady Bird Johnson in the 1960s.

"Here's a gentleman who could be president of the United States who is putting his hand out to us," said Roger Running Crane, vice chairman of the Blackfeet Tribe of northwest Montana. "It's great to see someone take an interest and see what is really happening with Indians today."

By reaching out to Native Americans, Obama was playing to a traditional Democratic constituency, but one with limited influence at the ballot box, said political analyst Craig Wilson of Montana State University-Billings.

He said Native Americans represent about 6.5 percent of Montana's population, one of the highest percentages in the nation.

"It's good politics, certainly for a Democrat," Wilson said. "Will it matter in terms of the election? No."

Matthew Brown is an Associated Press staff writer.