



Patterson: USET's Leaders Using 'The Good Mind' to Build a Legacy

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During the [United South and Eastern Tribes'](#) upcoming annual meeting, two students from member tribes will be honored for their participation last summer in a program at [Vanderbilt University](#) that will help them realize their dream careers in science and medicine.

USET and Vanderbilt partnered to sponsor Taloa Berg, a senior at Choctaw Central High School in Mississippi, and Nicodemus Bushyhead, a junior at Cherokee High School in North Carolina, in the [Aspironaut Program](#), a six-week internship program for students with dreams of succeeding careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The two students and a presentation about the USET-Vanderbilt initiative are at the top of the agenda after the opening ceremonies on Tuesday, October 9 –the first day of the annual meeting. The meeting will run through Friday, October 12, and is held this year at the Mohegan Sun in Connecticut.

Supporting the education of these outstanding students is a fine example of how the collective leadership of USET is using the *good mind* to create a legacy for future leaders and Indian country, USET President Brian Patterson told Indian Country Today Media Network. "USET has experienced much success, however, there's much more for USET and Indian country to do – and it's all in pursuit of the advancement of true sovereignty and self determination to secure our future. That's the sole focus," Patterson said. The task at hand is to use the good mind to get there. "I really compliment my USET leadership for their courage and strength, and during this next annual meeting we'll begin to identify the visioning and the strategic path forward," he said.

When Patterson, a citizen and council member of the [Oneida Indian Nation](#), talks about the good mind, he's referring to a specific [Haudenosaunee](#) tradition that goes back thousands of years to when the [Peacemaker](#) brought a message of peace and unity to the warring Haudenosaunee nations—the Oneida, Seneca, Onondaga, Mohawk, and Cayuga. (The Tuscarora nation joined later.) The good mind is "a discipline, rather than just a description of a person's state of mind," says Onondaga Nation citizen [Frieda Jacques](#). "The good mind recognizes that we are connected to the good, that we have access to a loving source of good thoughts. With discipline we can become aware of each thought, see its substance, realize its intent and then determine if we should follow and build on that thought."

The good mind is needed more than ever now as Indian country faces so many challenges, Patterson said. "While there have been advances in Indian country, during our last USET meeting our general counsel in making a presentation to the board of directors used the metaphor of being on the Titanic to describe the position of Indian country. Our challenge as an organization is to take a proactive aggressive approach to prevent a disaster and the destruction of the core principles of sovereignty," Patterson said. "We see the writing on the wall – [sequestration](#) cuts to the budget, impediments to economic development from (the U.S. Supreme Court rulings in) [Carcieri](#) and [Patchak](#), land uncertainty, ever increasing encroachment on sovereignty with taxation efforts. These issues are not resolved and they are significant barriers and challenges in Indian country nation building and re-establishing our homelands."

Patterson said. "We need the good mind at the table to forge solutions to these issues."

All of those issues and more will be discussed at USET's annual meeting next week. The agenda at the general assembly on the first day includes: Legislative Update – a Senate Perspective with Loretta Tuell, staff director and chief counsel of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs; comprehensive Tax reform Panel discussion with Richard Litsey, counsel and senior advisor on Indian Affairs for the Senate Finance Committee, Dante Desiderio, executive director of the Native American Finance Officers Association, F. Michael Willis, a partner in the firm Hobbs, Straus, Dean, & Walker, and Derrick Beetso, staff attorney for the National Congress of American Indians. The Interior Department's Solicitors Office will provide a perspective on the U.S. Supreme Court's Patchak ruling. USET's dozen committees will also meeting. They are culture and heritage, social services, economic development and entrepreneurship, transportation, education, tribal administration, health, tribal emergency services, housing, tribal justice, natural resources, and veterans affairs.

Patterson was quick to point out that Indian country has had some significant victories, such as the [Helping Expedite and Advance Responsible Tribal Homeownership](#) (HEARTH) Act, which allows tribes to enter into certain surface leases without prior expressed approval of the U.S. Secretary of the Interior, promising to speed up a bureaucratic process long considered broken. President Obama [signed](#) the HEARTH Act into law on July 30. “The challenge now for Indian country is to identify how to realize the full potential of the Act,” Patterson said.

Patterson speaks often of USET’s motto – “Because there is strength in unity” – an approach that embodies the good mind, he said. An example of that strength took place during the recent Tribal Unity Impact Week, a collaboration between USET and the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). Patterson said, that the tribes’ unified approach yielded good results: By the end of the week, the House of Representatives had passed the [FEMA Reauthorization Act of 2012](#), which includes tribal amendments to the Stafford Act, and the Senate had [confirmed](#) the nomination of Kevin Washburn, Dean of the University of New Mexico’s School of Law, as the Interior Department’s new Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs. NCAI President Jefferson Keel noted that “[t]he unified efforts of tribal leaders and advocates [the week of September 17] brought an immediate impact and offers encouraging signs for our remaining priorities.” Patterson said the unified efforts are another example of the good mind. “I think it’s a common approach whether it’s realized or not.”

USET will hold its biannual elections during its annual meeting this year and Patterson is making a pitch for re-election, not only for himself, but also for the other officers – Vice President Randy Noka, Treasurer Penobscot Indian Nation Chief Kirk Francis, and Secretary Brenda W. Lintinger – because they are such an effective team, he said. “For the first time in USET’s 44 year history, we have an annual report. And we developed a one-year strategic plan for goals and objectives, but I need to push that measure even further and if I’m re-elected I’ll establish a long-range three-to-five year strategic plan based on our tribal nations’ priorities as well as a visioning document that reflects what we need to be successful.”

Being successful means “ finding solutions proactively and aggressively” to today’s issues in order to building a legacy for future generations, Patterson said. “Our duty and responsibility is to make a place for those children that are still to come into the world,” Patterson said. “I think it’s time for Indian country once again to dream the dream that our fathers and mothers dared to dream –the one that allowed our generation to advance on the path of sovereignty and self determination.”