

Congresswoman Deb Haaland (NM-01), Pueblo of Laguna
NCAI Congressional Response for the State of Indian Nations
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Goo wad zee Ho-pa. Du hin o me Idzadyueedza, suimi hanu

Thank you NCAI President Jefferson Keel for your leadership and words of wisdom and truth.

Thank you NCAI 1st Vice President and Chairman, Dr. Aaron Payment, for your kind introduction, and for your outspoken nature on the issues that concern all of Indian Country.

WE are standing on Indian land, and I thank all the ancestors for allowing me a voice in this space today.

This year marks the first time in history that Native American women have had Congressional representation. I am deeply honored to have been elected, and I carry a great weight of responsibility to uphold the integrity of my position—to help move our communities forward so we will continue be proud of who we are and where we come from.

We have an opportunity to change our narrative, to weave ourselves a story moving forward in the fabric of America with our own art and tools. Stories that have been authored by those outside of our communities—often without our consent—that have been inadvertently absorbed as the truth about who we are as people; what we should believe about ourselves; and false depictions of our heritage and history, no longer have to be read.

I am an enrolled member of the Pueblo of Laguna - one of the 19 Pueblos located and one of the 23 separate Native Nations in New Mexico. While each of our 23 sovereign governments, traditions, beliefs, and politics differ from one another; many of us share a tradition that has been passed down from our spirits to our elders that has carried our stories and prayers into the present day.

Collectively, Indigenous people share the gift of weaving as a practice that has provided us the skills that aided our survival and brought beauty into our communities. Weaving teaches us discipline, self-control, and patience in the process of creating a larger product to share, that is also utilitarian.

The stories that are told to us as children are woven into our baskets, rugs and blankets and exchanged across space and time. These weavings explain where we came from and who we are. Our secrets are preserved in the practice—handed down to each successive generation so we have the privilege of knowing our past, and so our children can continue to create patterns of their own.

Although our weavings tell stories that are not written; they are authored by us and illustrate a story that tells us that our people are survivors and that we are resilient.

*From blankets laced with smallpox to Long Walks and Trails of Tears leading to death camps and winter massacres at Wounded Knee: **our blankets** kept us warm and those who lived, told a story of our families' survival of genocide, drought, and famine.*

*From assimilation to mass reductions of our livestock; to trading posts' exploitation of Native American culture and labor; **Our rugs** provided us with economic opportunities to tell a story of our continued rise out of mass poverty and our entrepreneurial spirit.*

*From lack of access to running water and isolated reservation lands where our people were sent to die; **Our baskets** carried our water and food to tell us a story of resilience and strength.*

Multiple times throughout history, others have tried to reshape our story of strength and resilience— like boarding schools that tried to beat this story from our grandparents' memory, stealing our languages in an attempt to “kill the Indian and save the man.”

Our families have carried the psychological devastation of the federal government's failed policies. However, our families also continue to hand down our blankets, baskets, and rugs that contain our stories of strength that move us forward and give us hope.

In recent times, that hope has been compromised by a president whose fails to acknowledge our nation's history, and in the process, he fails to live up to the trust obligations of the US Government. His Ignorant and tone-deaf statements illustrate that our voices have been lost or minimized in national dialogue -- because we have largely been without Native American representation.

Today, I'd like to highlight the suicide crisis with our Native youth - the second leading cause of death among Native American youth between the ages of 10 – 24, severely exceeding the national average. Our children are far more valuable to our communities than this—it is our responsibility as leaders to blend the power of our voices together to help our children know their history so they can be proud of that inheritance, and know their obligation to carry it on.

For me, our collective voice was apparent when I witnessed its power at Standing Rock. This marked a point in modern history where our peoples' voices proved that we could have political power and national support. There I witnessed the strength and resilience that our communities have maintained throughout time.

In the past, even though corrosive federal policies have tried to eradicate our people—we are still here. Even though blatant racist depictions of our culture remain memorialized in disposable sports memorabilia—we remain strong. Even though the President's despicable remarks remain unapologetically immortalized on internet platforms that more than 90% of our citizens don't have access to—we remain unphased. This is because patience and self-control were skills that got our ancestors through the worst of days.

And while we can never forget the devastation of what we have endured in the past—just like we will not forget to bring our blankets, rugs, and baskets with us no matter where we go—we will

weave beauty into our environments with new patterns to create new designs for our people as we have been taught to do. This is why— at State of the Union Address last week—I took my own blanket to save my seat—because that is who we are and to reshape the national narrative through our own voice, we must rethink how we represent ourselves in the larger picture.

Part of redefining who we are starts at home. Last week at the University of New Mexico, the first major public discussion of Pueblo feminism took place during the 20th Annual American Indian Studies Association Conference. During a panel, students described the presence of women and two-spirit people in modern tribal governance. One of the female students said, “I am never going to be a governor or hold a leadership position in my Tribe, because these are only positions reserved for males. This is probably why Deb Haaland ran for Congress—because she knew she couldn’t have political power within our existing system.” I ask, Is this the message that we should pass down to our youth?

Some tribes continue to practice a European tradition of patriarchal governments that refuse to allow women a seat at the table. As another one of these bright young women said, “we are survivors of colonialism, but we don’t have to continue to live in it.” To the students who organized this discussion to shed light on this issue—thank you for your bravery and strength. Your leadership is what keeps me moving forward. I see you, and I hear you.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women—#SilentCrisis

The crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous and violence against women cannot be overlooked any longer.

On the federal level, I am working to provide resources for those who have continually been at the losing end of funding and advocacy. I appreciate the recent work that tribal governments have done to shed light on the silent crisis of gender violence and violence against our women that have gone overlooked in Indian Country for too long.

Most of all, I thank the Native women who have endured generations of systematic violence who are 10x more likely to be murdered and 4x more likely to be sexually assaulted when compared to the national average. In 2016, it was reported that 8 in 10 Native women had survived serious violence during their lifetimes; 50% have suffered sexual violence; and 90% of these cases have involved a non-Native perpetrator.

Further exacerbating this issue, the US Commission on Civil Rights’ Broken Promises Report states that “crime and victimization in Indian Country is [caused by] the systemic underfunding of tribal law enforcement and criminal justice systems coupled with preexisting barriers”

In communities with the nation’s highest rates of crime that are comparable to dense urban cities like Detroit and Los Angeles; I am building on legislation like Savanna’s Act and VAWA to provide our women with programmatic resources that will expand to urban areas where many Native Americans are frequently overlooked in this silent crisis. My work will also provide resources to families of missing women.

Government Shutdown

*We continued to make history last month with the **longest** government shutdown in United States history that stretched into an unnecessary 35-day long period. As we know, these shutdowns significantly and disproportionately impact Tribal Nations by cutting off federal funding for public safety, health care services, and food distribution programs.*

I heard from numerous Tribes struggling with the lack of access to their federal funding – funding that is obligated by our nation’s trust responsibility to tribes. Accounts were significantly depleted, and in some cases, Tribes were unable to receive draw-down funds from the Interior because administrative staff had been deemed “non-essential.”

During the shutdown, federal and tribal employees found themselves choosing between food and medicine. This is why I co-introduced two pieces of legislation on Friday to provide advanced appropriations for basic services in Indian Country. These bills will ensure that: 1) the delivery of health care and public safety services are available for Native Americans during future governments shutdowns; and 2) Indian health care providers can pay their employees.

I am also working on drafting a comprehensive response to the Broken Promises Report – so that the federal government lives up to its trust responsibilities. I expect to have draft language in the coming months.

Environmental Justice

As we see, many of the environmental issues Indian Country currently faces, are also woven together. Last week, after significant pressure from our Natural Resources Committee, the New Mexico delegation and tribes; BLM’s New Mexico State Office pulled back 9 land parcels scheduled for the March oil and gas lease sale; a sale they continued to work on even during the shutdown! For the time being, this will help preserve our beloved Chaco Canyon from oil and gas development and protect cultural sites that this administration has moved forward, while ignoring tribal consultation.

We still have more work to do. As Vice Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources, I’m committed to protecting our sacred lands, addressing climate change, and moving renewable energy forward, so we can pass our natural treasures down to our children.

Last week, I introduced my first bill—the ANTIQUITIES Act of 2019. This bill reinforces the clear intent that only Congress has the authority to modify a national monument designation and provides continuity in the federal process.

I am also advocating for the expansion of the Bears Ears Monument and supporting environmental justice initiatives to invest in clean energy jobs and infrastructure to reduce greenhouse gas pollution and promote conservation through a healthier environment, thereby reducing our carbon footprint.

Lack of Broadband—#Digital Reservations

The federal government has also created a new reservation further isolating Indian Country and propelling us further into silence. This is the modern Digital Reservation. The lack of broadband for Tribes – and rural communities across our country, is an injustice that hinders every facet of modern life including access to education. In Indian Country where it’s not uncommon for

communities to have unemployment rates of up to 40%; isolation and poverty run rampant and lack of broadband further disenfranchises entire communities.

Currently, less than 10% of homes have broadband services, which is lower than the rate of developing countries. In 2009, the USDA reported that rural communities with greater broadband access had greater economic growth which directly impacts the ability to gain access to education, apply for jobs, reach public safety services, and general communication. Finding a solution to these new Digital Reservations is a top priority of mine and a necessity for Indian Country and every rural community.

Generally, we must continue to encourage people to exercise their voices through the ballot box and encourage folks to run for elected positions where many have remained unrepresented and unheard: local school boards, city councils, county commissions, and state legislatures, and this also means Native women!

The real narrative of Native women cannot be minimized—they are woven with resiliency and strength—

- *like **Pocahontas**, a Powhatan girl, who survived abduction and rape at 12 years old but bridged diplomatic relations between England and her Tribe;*
- *like **Sacagawea**, a bilingual Shoshone woman, who led an expedition over 7,500 miles across the United States, on foot, carrying her newborn baby;*
- *like **Ruth Buffalo**, a citizen of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, who became the first Native American Democratic woman elected to the North Dakota Legislature;*
- *like **LaDonna Harris**, a Comanche national leader, who reshaped worldviews of our people through social activism and among many accomplishments, helped Menominee gain federal recognition;*
- *like **Peggy Flanagan**, a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, who recently became Lt. Governor of Minnesota and the highest-ranking Native woman elected to executive office in the history of the United States;*
- *And of course, my sister and dear friend **Sharice Davids**, a Ho-Chunk MMA fighter, who recently became the first LGBT Native American member of Congress.*

THESE are real stories of our Native people—narrated BY us. My promise to you is that I will work hard to carry our voices in Congress; to help weave a promising future for all of Indian Country, so that we are no longer hidden in plain view. My hope for you is that no matter where you are or what is going on in your life that you can create beauty as long as you always remember that every day is a good day to be Indigenous.

Dah wah eh, naytra, econopah, esquallie, ahee-he. Thank you.