



NCAI NEWS

For Immediate Release
Oct. 7, 2002

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SENATE MAJORITY LEADER THOMAS DASCHLE ADDRESSES RALLY FOR TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

(Washington, D.C.) Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle joined the approximately 40 American Indian runners who participated in the last segment of a 2,800-mile cross-country relay run across the United States, which ended today at the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in the Nation's Capital. More than 50 American Indian Tribes, which included Alaska Native nations, Puerto Rican Native people (Taino), one Canadian First Nation, and Native Hawaiians, concluded the run which began approximately one month ago on the Quinault Indian Reservation in Washington state. The run ended today at the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in Washington, D.C.

Running with Senator Daschle was National Congress of American Indians President Tex G. Hall, and Mark Esherick, head of Government Affairs, Siemens. Siemens sponsored the tee shirts that were made available to all of the runners.

The runners departed from Washington National Cathedral at 8:30 a.m. E.T. and arrived at the Supreme Court at 9:50 a.m. E.T. More than 200 people – many with their own Native nations' flags and carrying brightly colored signs -- had already gathered at the Supreme Court for the Rally, which was intended to raise public awareness about Tribes' right to self governance and also to raise money for a major tribal endeavor called the Sovereignty Protection Initiative.

The tribes gathered at the U.S. Supreme Court, the site of a number of devastating decisions that have been delivered against tribes over the past two decades which served to significantly erode tribal sovereignty. Today is the first day of the Court's 2003 term, in which several key cases of concern to tribes are scheduled to be heard.

Speakers at the rally included: Daschle; Hall; Navajo Nation President Kelsey Begaye; Quinault Tribal Chairwoman Pearl Capoeman-Baller; Jamestown S'Klallam (Wash.) Tribal Chairman W. Ron Allen; Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians (Calif.) former Chairman Anthony Pico; and Jacqueline Johnson, NCAI Executive Director. Sovereignty Run Team Leader Fawn Sharp (Quinault), who participated on the run throughout its entire cross-country course talked about the many people, tribes and kindnesses that the runners experienced on the way to Washington, D.C. Alma Ransom, a Chief of the St. Regis Mohawk Nation (N.Y.) and NCAI Treasurer, delivered the opening and closing prayers. Ransom was accompanied by the St. Regis Mohawk Faithkeepers. Cedar Tree, a local group, provided the drum.

"Tribal sovereignty is a fundamental American principle that is rooted in laws and treaties and cannot be broken," said Daschle. "The federal government has unique legal and moral obligations to Native

Americans and it's critical that we honor those obligations...we need to do a better job...there are immense unmet needs in Indian country – for good schools, health care, jobs and economic development, affordable housing and other needs.”

“Washington needs to work with tribes to meet those needs in a way that honors another fundamental value...the right of tribal self-determination,” said Daschle.

“This is only the beginning of our struggle,” said Hall. “It is a struggle that all of Indian Country is squarely behind, evidenced by the great number of native runners who took part in our national sovereignty run.”

The “Sovereignty Run” is part of a larger program called the Tribal Governance and Economic Enhancement Initiative, also known as the Sovereignty Protection Initiative. The Initiative, which was launched in September 2001, is a coordinated, all-tribal strategy designed to address the increasing diminishment of tribal self-government and jurisdiction as a result of recent Supreme Court rulings, such as Nevada vs. Hicks and Atkinson Trading Co. v. Shirley – decisions that have raised strong concerns among tribes that the Supreme Court is on an accelerating trend toward removing tribal jurisdiction within tribal territories. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the Navajo Nation and prominent American Indian tribal leaders are spearheading the Initiative.

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