PROSPERITY THROUGH SOVEREIGNTY

2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT
National Congress of American Indians
“A tide of respect is building. Leading companies are engaging with us, partnering with us, and standing with us. We are survivors and we are growing stronger every day. We are thriving 21st century governments, built on self-determination.”

- Brian Cladoosby, NCAI President, 2016 State of Indian Nations Address

A canoe nears shore in the 2016 Paddle to Nisqually Canoe Journey. (Photo: Zoltán Grossman)

WHY NCAI?

If you are not already an NCAI member or contributor, please consider joining us.

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is the oldest, largest, and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization serving the broad interests of tribal nations, governments, and communities.

Through the decades, NCAI answers the call of its founders to serve as the unified voice of tribal nations. NCAI provides the governments and leaders of those nations a powerful platform for consensus-based policy development and advocacy. In so doing, it protects tribal self-governance and treaty rights; promotes the economic development, health, and welfare of tribal communities; and educates the public toward a better understanding of tribal nations.

NCAI’s effectiveness in strengthening tribal sovereignty and advancing Indian Country’s priorities is rooted in the wisdom and involvement of our diverse membership. This includes a growing number of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, tribal citizens, and Native organizations from across the country. Working in partnership, NCAI and its members amplify the collective voice of tribal nations to achieve a brighter future for Indian Country and the generations to come.
NCAI holds 72nd Annual Convention in San Diego, CA.

California becomes first state in U.S. history to ban R-word Mascots in public schools.

The Department of Education issues School Environment Listening Session final report from first ever listening tour of Native students.

7th Annual White House Tribal Nations Summit.

The Department of the Interior publishes final rule on Rights-of-Way on Indian lands.

NativeOneStop.gov launched by U.S. government to give Indian Country easy, online access to federal resources and programs.

President signs the Every Student Succeeds Act into law, including significant tribal provisions. 1

More than 250 Native delegates advocate for Indigenous rights in the Paris Climate Change Conference.

NCAI holds 14th annual State of Indian Nations Address.

21st Century Trust Modernization Forum for a new vision of the trust relationship hosted by NCAI.

The Swinomish Indian Tribal Community first to exercise sovereignty in employing first Lower 48 Dental Health Aide Therapist (DHAT).

NCAI releases FY 2017 Indian Country Budget Request.

NCAI Executive Council Winter Session in Washington, DC.

NCAI testifies on Native American economic opportunity before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

Government Accountability Office issues report on broadband in Indian Country.

NCAI testifies in the Senate on the President’s FY 2017 Indian Country budget.

NCAI urges nomination of Supreme Court justice who respects Tribal Governments.

Indigenous people attend Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau state visit. 2

NCAI testifies in the Senate in support of reliable medical access to King Cove, Alaska.

U.S. Supreme Court in Nebraska v. Parker finds in favor of Omaha Tribe reservation borders.
**MAY 2016**

Congress passes Native American Children’s Safety Act improving protections for Native children.

Tribal leaders give input to White House Council on Native American Affairs natural resources subgroup.

NCAI testifies in the House of Representatives in support of commission on Native children.

The United Nations holds consultations on the participation of indigenous governments at the United Nations.¹

**JUNE 2016**

Congress passes Indian Trust Asset Management Reform Act, empowering tribes to better manage their own trust assets.

U.S. Supreme Court upholds tribal sovereignty in Dollar General and U.S. v. Bryant decisions.

Department of the Interior issues updated regulations for the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) for first time since 1979.

After 30 years of negotiations, the Organization of American States adopts a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

**JULY 2016 (CONT.)**

Ears Needs You in Bluff meeting with Secretary Jewell

Saturday, July 16 - 11AM
Bluff Community Center

NCAI Mid-Year Conference and Marketplace, Spokane, WA

Secretary of the Interior Jewell visits Utah on protection of Bear Ears buttes and possible co-management.

California court affirms placement of young Choctaw girl Lexi with her extended family under ICWA.

NCAI joins tribal delegation for nation to nation visit to Cuba for cultural, diplomatic and economic exchanges.⁴

**JULY 2016 (CONT.)**

The U.S., Canada and Mexico announce collaboration to address violence against indigenous women and girls.³

The State of Alaska announces halt to appeal litigation, opening land into trust process for Alaskan tribes.

8th Annual White House Tribal Nations Summit.

NCAI President Cladoosby is first tribal leader invited to participate in a meeting of the White House Council on Native American Affairs.

**SEPTEMBER 2016**

As a result of historic tribal unity, the federal government pauses construction to Dakota Access Pipeline for tribal consultation and impact review.

The Department of the Interior announces a final rule for reestablishing a formal government-to-government relationship with Native Hawaiians.⁴

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

TIMELINE OF PROGRESS

2015 - 2016

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DEAR TRIBAL LEADERS, NCAI MEMBERS, NATIVE PEOPLES, AND FRIENDS OF INDIAN COUNTRY:

NCAI and the Executive Committee are deeply grateful for the support you’ve given to the National Congress of American Indians. It is my honor and privilege to serve as NCAI’s President with an incredible Executive Committee made up of dedicated tribal leaders who are committed to serving the best interests of all of Indian Country. This year’s annual report speaks to the prosperity that our great tribal nations can achieve through sovereignty, and the many ways NCAI defends and advances that sovereignty.

We have come to a remarkable time in the history of tribal nations. Looking back over the past eight years, I’m struck by the incredible progress of Indian Country under the current Administration. NCAI has worked very closely, tirelessly and successfully with tribal leaders, partners, policymakers, and officials to move in a common direction, and address the unmet needs of our tribes.

Thousands of acres of our tribal homelands have been restored. Indian health care has been permanently reauthorized. Indian women and children have greater protections. Tribal jurisdiction and boundaries have been upheld in the U.S. Supreme Court. Settlements with the federal government are providing hundreds of millions of dollars of compensation to Indian Country. The sovereign status of tribal nations is more widely recognized at home, and abroad, than it has been in 200 years.

We have to press just as ferociously moving forward, not only to keep the ground we’ve gained but to chart our path to a new and modern trust relationship. The importance of the Native Vote in setting that course can’t be overstated. Our citizens must register and vote, and show that our voices don’t just tell our own stories; they shape the story of this united nation.

What’s happening at the Standing Rock Sioux reservation to defend tribal water sources and cultural sites is a deeply spiritual, historic and unifying assertion of the recognition and respect we deserve.

For far too long, our lands and resources were seen as disposable and consultation requirements were not fulfilled, leaving tribal voices diminished in the larger conversation. All tribes have faced this in one form or another. Standing Rock has become a symbol for that shared injustice, bringing Indian Country together in a way we haven’t seen for more than 100 years. It’s a defining moment for Indian Country and for the United States.

Many are asking why this particular situation has struck such a chord throughout Indian Country. It is simple. What all tribes want to leave to the next generations includes our lands, waters, natural resources and sacred places. When these are lost, it does irreversible harm to our tribes.

NCAI stands with Standing Rock. We stand with Indian Country. We stand for the empowerment of all tribal nations to flourish through recognition of our inherent sovereignty. We thank you for your partnership with NCAI, and supporting the work that will leave a legacy of progress, unification, respect and prosperity for the generations yet to be.

Sincerely,

Brian Cladoosby – President
National Congress of American Indians
NCAI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

PRESIDENT
Brian Cladoosby – Chairman
Swinomish Indian Tribal Community

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT
Fawn Sharp – President
Quinault Nation

SECRETARY
Aaron Payment – Chairperson
Sault St. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians

TREASURER
W. Ron Allen, Chairman
Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe

NCAI VICE PRESIDENTS

ALASKA
Jerry Isaac – CEO
Native Village of Tanacross

EASTERN OKLAHOMA
Joe Byrd – Speaker of the Nation
Cherokee Nation

GREAT PLAINS
Leander McDonald – President
United Tribes Technical College

MIDWEST
Roger Rader – Council Member
Pokagon Band of Potawatomi

NORtheast
Lance Gumbs – Tribal Council Member
Shinnecock Indian Nation

NORTHWEST
Mel Sheldon, Jr. – 1st Vice President
Tulalip Tribe of Washington

PACIFIC
Jack Potter, Jr. – Chairman
Redding Rancheria

ROCKY MOUNTAIN
Darrin Old Coyote – Chairman
Crow Nation

SOUTHWEST
Larry Townsend – Tribal Council Member
Lumbee Tribe

SOUTHERN PLAINS
Liana Onnen – Chairwoman
Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation

SOUTHEAST
Joe Garcia – Councilman
Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo

WESTERN
Bruce Ignacio – Councilman
Uintah and Ouray Ute Tribe

ALTERNATES

ALASKA
Rob Sanderson, Jr. – Second V.P.
Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida
Indian Tribes of Alaska (CCTHITA)

EASTERN OKLAHOMA
Norman Hildebrand – Second Chief
Wyandotte Nation

GREAT PLAINS
Vermon Miller – Tribal Chairman
Omaha Tribe of Nebraska

MIDWEST
Carolyn Beaulieu – Secretary/Treasurer
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

NORtheast
Fatima Dames – Councilwoman
Mashantucket Pequot Tribe

NORTHWEST
Theresa Sheldon – Council Member
Tulalip Tribe

PACIFIC
Charlie Wright – Tribal Chairman
Cortina Rancheria-Kletsel Dehe
Band of Wintun Indians

ROCKY MOUNTAIN
Shawn Backbone – Vice Secretary
Crow Nation

SOUTHEAST
Vinnie Bryant – Coharie People Board Member
Coharie Tribe

SOUTHERN PLAINS
(JVacant)

SOUTHWEST
Joseph Naranjo – Tribal Council Member
Pueblo of Santa Clara

WESTERN
Tony Small – Member Ute Business Committee
Ute Indian Tribe
DEAR NCAI MEMBERS, FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS:

The prosperity of Indian Country can only be gained through the recognition of our inherent sovereign rights as tribal governments. NCAI advances the significant initiatives and legislative priorities of Indian Country every day in Washington, DC. Our work is only possible through the determination of our members, and the collaboration of partners, supporters, tribes and government leaders. The power of unity through NCAI and focus on solutions has resulted in significant milestones for tribal nations.

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act, tribal self-determination in education is expanded through improved consultation, curriculum, funding and technical assistance. The Indian Trust Asset Management Reform Act includes an Indian asset demonstration project, and empowers tribes to better manage their own trust assets. Years of effective, coordinated strategy between NCAI, the Native American Rights Fund, and legal allies came to fruition in three significant victories in the U.S. Supreme Court in 2016.

NCAI’s efforts helped secure important victories for indigenous peoples on the international stage, including recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples, consultation on participation at the United Nations, and the coalition of the United States, Canada and Mexico to address violence against indigenous women and girls.

NCAI remains focused on a visionary, proactive agenda for Indian Country. Advocacy continues for conditions that promote comprehensive economic development for tribal nations. This includes parity to tribal governments in labor relations; increased funding of tribal justice and victim services; recognition of tribal self-determination over our natural resources; and improved federal programs and resources that empower tribal self-determination. NCAI’s Policy Research Center, and NCAI’s Partnership for Tribal Governance, infuse tribal data into this advocacy and support implementation of these programs.

This is a presidential election year, and NCAI vigorously engages in national dialogue on the interests and contributions of tribal populations. NCAI’s resources to tribal citizens help support a coast-to-coast network to protect, expand, and mobilize the Native Vote. We have the power with our vote to reflect the same collective strength that has gathered in support of Standing Rock; a strength that led the federal government to greater tribal consultation and protection of our precious heritage sites.

With input from tribal leaders, tribal organizations and other stakeholders, NCAI has shaped its strategy to bring this strength to the next Administration. NCAI has crafted a comprehensive 2016 Presidential Transition Plan, outlining Indian Country priorities to the next senior members of the Administration.

The Transition Plan builds on the progressive cooperation of the last several years, which set a new foundation for the nation-to-nation relationship of tribes and the federal government. We have to be vigilant not to lose that progress, and to keep building a culture of prosperity for all tribal nations.

NCAI is honored to serve as a fierce warrior for sovereignty, and be a rich resource for Indian Country, the federal government, and the general public. We thank the Executive Committee, our members, NCAI volunteers and staff, and our remarkable partners in our mission to strengthen tribal sovereignty.

Sincerely,

Jacqueline Pata – Executive Director
National Congress of American Indians
NCAI’s founding members came together in 1944 to establish the organization in order to respond to the threat of the federal government’s termination and relocation policies. In the more than seven decades since, NCAI has diligently protected and advanced the inherent sovereign rights of tribal nations.

The theme of this year’s Annual Report, and of the 2016 NCAI Annual Convention, is Prosperity through Sovereignty. This theme stems from what we have always known – that tribal governments know best how to build sustainable progress for their citizens. Tribal nations are innovating in governance, developing their economies, and providing opportunities to their youth and citizens as they cultivate prosperous communities.

NCAI advances the priorities identified by our members in many ways. NCAI works closely with the Congress and the Administration to ensure the government-to-government relationship that exists between tribes and the federal government is honored. NCAI actively works with tribal governments and our organizational partners to secure federal laws that benefit tribes, and expand tribal programs of the Administration. NCAI also ensures that tribal views are considered when the Administration is implementing laws and revising the programs that impact tribal communities.

Acknowledging that our future belongs to Native youth, NCAI has created opportunities for youth to engage at the local and national level in policies that most directly impact their daily lives. NCAI, in partnership with the National Indian Child Welfare Association, the National Indian Education Association and the National Indian Health Board, has created the First Kids 1st initiative which creates a platform to connect Native youth and tribal governments across Indian Country. In addition, the NCAI Youth Commission, the Wilma Mankiller Fellowship program, and Native Graduate Health Fellowship program provide avenues for Native youth to engage national policy issues.

NCAI’s conferences offer valuable resources to NCAI members by sharing best practices, emerging models, national dialogue, local and regional discussion, and consensus-building resolutions which guide our advocacy work.

Please also see the sections in this report on Empowering Native Communities and Public Education to learn about other important aspects of NCAI’s work on governance and outreach in support of tribal sovereignty.

NCAI is honored to champion the interests of Indian Country as we work together to support and sustain prosperous, enduring communities and cultures for our tribal nations.
For the 14th consecutive year, NCAI held its annual State of Indian Nations address on January 15 in the Knight Studio at the Newseum in Washington, DC. This important event outlines the progress and priorities of Indian Country, and how tribal governments, the U.S. government, and their partners can work together for the benefit of all communities.

NCAI President Cladoosby addressed members of Congress, senior Administration officials, leaders of tribal nations, students, and many others joining via the live C-Span broadcast, over Native radio stations, or the livestream on the internet.

“We meet at a moment of progress and promise,” he stated, “Progress made possible by tribal self-determination.” President Cladoosby emphasized that when tribes forge their own paths, Indian Country benefits and America benefits.

Cladoosby remarked on Indian Country’s contributions to the national dialogue on shaping the wellbeing of our populations, highlighting tribal successes with economic equality; climate change; community security; and education, health and wellness.

A common refrain of this major policy address was the call to Congress and the Administration to honor the government-to-government relationship with Indian Country. In addition, President Cladoosby set forth Indian Country’s top-level priorities, and emphasized the benefits of empowering tribes to govern, innovate, and thrive.

He gave examples of where such empowerment is succeeding. For example, the Pueblo of Isleta now runs its local elementary school for the first time in a century, where students are now immersed in their language, values and traditions. The Confederated Tribes of Umatilla have reshaped their child welfare system, and now 70% more Umatilla children are thriving with their families in their home communities.

“At every level, more and more leaders are seeing that a path to a brighter future runs through Indian Country,” he concluded.
“We need policies and processes that recognize tribes as true partners in governing.”

– Brian Cladoosby, NCAI President

Congresswoman Betty McCollum (D-MN), co-chair of the Native American Caucus, provided the Congressional response to the State of Indian Nations address. While acknowledging recent policy achievements for tribal communities, McCollum noted that current law fails to fully recognize the inherent sovereignty of tribal governments.

The Congresswoman outlined steps to be taken together to carry the momentum of progress in Indian Country forward. She encouraged all listeners to hold members of Congress accountable for upholding the federal trust responsibility and understanding the issues important to tribal nations.

Questions from the studio audience and social media were answered by President Cladoosby and NCAI’s Executive Director Jaqueline Pata following the address and Congressional response.

TRUST MODERNIZATION FORUM

The Trust Modernization Workgroup, a collection of national and tribal organizations including NCAI, seeks to modernize the trust relationship between tribal nations and the federal government. The Workgroup leads a vision for a trust framework that is based in tribal self-determination and inherent tribal sovereignty.

Following the 2016 State of Indian Nations Address, NCAI and its partners in the Trust Modernization Workgroup hosted the 21st Century Trust Modernization forum. The forum featured a keynote address by the National Museum of the American Indian Director Kevin Gover, comments from Deputy Secretary Mike Connor from the U.S. Department of the Interior, and a spirited discussion among tribal leaders.

Trust modernization principles and strategies were shared to empower tribal self-governance. They included strengthening many elements of the trust relationship such as: tribal-federal relations; trust standards through the adoption of implementing laws and regulations; federal management for trust assets and programs still subject to federal control; federal funding and efficiencies; and the empowerment of each tribe to determine its own path.
President Barack Obama pledged to build a true nation-to-nation relationship with tribal governments, and the White House has hosted an annual White House Tribal Nations Conference with tribal leaders since 2009. Each year, NCAI has hosted a preparatory meeting for tribal leaders prior to the Conference and provided a Tribal Leader Briefing Book, featuring overarching priorities and key issues to discuss with President Obama and members of his Administration.

The 2015 Conference included armchair panels with Cabinet members and senior level officials, break-out sessions on top priority issues to Indian Country, and a roundtable discussion between President Obama and Native youth.

From the 2015 Conference came the announcement of several new key federal developments and initiatives for Indian Country, such as new Right of Way Regulations for tribal lands from the Department of the Interior; announcement of the first 10 tribes to join the initial phase of the Tribal Access Program for National Crime Information; changes to the Choice Neighborhoods Initiative to make tribes more competitive for funding; an announcement from Adidas to help schools nationwide to change harmful school mascots; and the appointment of Karen Diver (Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa) to serve as Special Assistant to the President for Native American Affairs, White House Domestic Policy Council.

On September 26, 2016, President Obama held his eighth and final White House Tribal Nations Conference. Tribal leaders from across the country, tribal youth, key federal officials, and President Obama gathered to discuss how they can work together in the remaining 117 days of the Obama Administration to cement a legacy that empowers the future of Indian Country.

This includes actions to promote economic development through tribal government parity; improve the efficiency of health care services; reinforce the pathways to educational opportunity; and address the disproportionality of Natives in the criminal justice system.

Tribal leaders and NCAI recognized and honored President Obama for the meaningful progress of his Administration to recognize tribal sovereignty and promote tribal self-determination. He was wrapped in a blanket with the thanks of Indian Country.

“As you complete your time as President of this great nation,” said NCAI President Brian Cladoosby, “we want to thank you for honoring many of your commitments and bless you as you move forward in your journey to help people throughout the land.”

NCAI will promote tribal sovereignty and self-determination through the transition into the next administration, and beyond. The 2016 NCAI Presidential Transition Plan is a comprehensive compilation of recommendations to the next Administration to protect and advance the inherent rights of tribal nations.
WHITE HOUSE COUNCIL ON NATIVE AMERICAN AFFAIRS

The White House Council on Native Affairs is an important representation of the federal government’s recognition of its government-to-government relationship with tribal nations. Established by President Obama in 2013, the purpose of the Council is for federal agencies to work in a more effective and collaborative manner with federally recognized tribes in order to promote and sustain resilient and prosperous tribal communities.

The Council encompasses more than 30 federal departments and agencies, and works across these executive offices to streamline policy recommendations and leverage federal programs and resources available to tribal nations and communities. The working groups of the Council flow from the priorities shared by tribal leaders.

NCAI collaborates with the Council to bring vital tribal nation input into this process. In response to tribal feedback, a new subgroup on natural resources convened to hear tribal leader comments in May 2016.

NCAI President Brian Cladoosby was the first tribal leader invited to participate in a meeting of the full Council in September 2016. Among other recommendations for action in the remaining Obama Administration was the request for a new Memorandum of Opinion on the scope of the federal trust obligations, to set the framework for how future administrations interact with tribal governments.

Also in September 2016, following the White House Tribal Nations Conference, the Council hosted meetings throughout the day at the Department of the Interior. The sessions addressed topics including federal policies, health, economic development and infrastructure, education and energy development.

NCAI is requesting of future administrations that the Council continue its cross-agency work with tribal governments to help build and strengthen tribal communities.

STRENGTHENING SOVEREIGNTY

GENERATION INDIGENOUS (GEN I)

NCAI is one of the leading organizations, working together with other Native organizations and philanthropic partners, to identify and expand investments in Native youth programs. In 2014, President Obama announced the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) initiative at the White House Tribal Nations Conference. Gen-I was created to help generate more opportunities and improve the lives of Native youth in an inclusive, culturally appropriate manner, as well as increase and strengthen the Administration’s engagement with public and private partners.

Through the recognition of President Obama of the unique challenges facing Native youth, more Cabinet members have traveled and engaged in Indian Country and met with Native youth than in any prior presidential Administration.

Gen-I Challenge: More than 5,000 Native youth have accepted the Challenge and more are taking the initiative to make a difference every day. Some commitments that youth have made include organizing a community clean-up, hosting language and culture classes, and protecting sacred sites and advocating for their preservation.

Tribes and partner organizations are encouraged to take the Gen-I challenge as well; currently, there are about 30 tribes and 10 partners that have accepted the Gen-I Challenge. To participate in the challenge visit: https://genindigenous.com/tribal-leaders-challenge/.
NCAI YOUTH INITIATIVES

NCAI YOUTH PARTNERS AND FIRST KIDS 1ST

There are over a million Native Youth today, making up 39 percent of the American Indian and Alaska Native population. NCAI has seen the positive impact of this generation and knows of their great potential. Tribal leaders strive to ensure that youth have the tools and resources to positively impact their communities. NCAI works to create structures of support within the tribes, regional organizations, and national partners for the growth of our Native youth.

NCAI launched the “First Kids 1st: Every Child is Sacred” initiative with our partners – National Indian Education Association (NIEA), National Indian Health Board (NIHB), and National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). The collaboration began in 2008 with the creation of the original National Children’s Agenda that was updated in 2015 as the Native Children’s Policy Agenda: Putting First Kids 1st, with tribal strategies and policy objectives to implement its principles.

The First Kids 1st initiative came together formally at the 2015 Annual Convention with a signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the partner organizations, NIEA, NIHB, NICWA and NCAI. The MOU states that the First Kids 1st initiative “will convey that Indian Country is choosing to put its children first as our number one priority.”

“First Kids 1st asks for all of us to make our Native children and youth our first priority. In whatever position we hold, we all have the opportunity to ensure our youth will thrive and prosper. Through love, responsibility, and focus we can take opportunities for our children and youth to the next level,” shared NCAI Executive Director Jaqueline Pata in a press release.

In June 2016, the First Kids 1st initiative received generous multiyear funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, to stimulate systems changes in education, health, welfare, and governance to better support Native children and youth. In each of these areas, community-determined and community-driven changes will improve the systems that impact Native youth, allowing them more and better opportunities to achieve their full potential.

Through multi-media communications, community engagement, data development, policy analysis, and capacity building, the First Kids 1st movement will offer a range of strategies, activities and tools so that communities can design and implement the solutions that best address their needs.

To further its First Kids 1st work, NCAI has been involved with a number of other Native youth-focused activities during the past year, including:

- My Brother’s Keeper
- “NAT$VE in the BANK” financial capacity building initiative
- NCAI Youth Commission
- Gen-I (Generation Indigenous)
- Partners Supporting Native Youth
- Tribal Exchange Stock Market Game
- Student Embassy of Tribal Nations visits
- NCAI Fellowship and Internship Programs

NCAI’s conferences remain a great vehicle to share latest projects, a place to receive input, and mold the work of Native youth going forward. They create a unique opportunity for tribal leaders, Native youth, and partners to work together on youth issues.
The NCAI Youth Commission was established in 1997 by the NCAI Executive Committee to foster the voices of Native youth. The Youth Commission is open to all Native youth and is provided with the resources and support they need to share ideas and create the change they would like to see for Indian Country. Native youth from across the country get to connect, inform, and learn from tribal leaders and get a larger insight of NCAI’s work. Through their participation, the Youth Commissioners can better advocate for their communities and Indian Country.

Every two years at NCAI’s Annual Convention, elections are held to select ten Native youth to serve as Youth Commission Officers.

During the 2014-2016 Youth Commission term, members are focused on growing NCAI’s youth network and encouraging youth to work to reach their full potential. The Commission’s officers are as follows:

- **Tyler Owens** – Co-President
  *Gila River Indian Community*

- **Jared Massey** – Co-President
  *White Mountain Apache Tribe and Navajo Nation*

- **Cassondra Church** – Co-Vice President
  *Pokagon Band of Potawatomi*

- **Brian Weeden** – Co-Vice President
  *Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe*

- **David Colbert** – Treasurer
  *Muscogee (Creek) Nation*

- **Brian Barlow** – Secretary
  *Cherokee Nation*

- **Mary Guenther** – Member-At-Large
  *Aleut*

- **Michaela Custodio** – Member-At-Large
  *Ho-Chunk Nation*

- **Skyler Daisy** – Member-At-Large
  *Pokagon Band of Potawatomi*

At the 2016 Mid Year Conference, the Youth Commission again created a parallel agenda to NCAI’s sessions. This included a special session with the Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, participation in real-time news developments about the harm from disparaging Native stereotypes, and building the network to mobilize the Native Vote.

NCAI also works in partnership with the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) and Native Americans in Philanthropy (NAP) to hold sessions on the impact of investments in Native youth. NCAI is honored to do our part to help to give a voice to the Native youth of today, while protecting and strengthening sovereignty for our future generations.
WILMA MANKILLER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM
FOR POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

Wilma Mankiller was the first female Chief of the Cherokee Nation, and became a national role model for her activism on behalf of Native Americans. NCAI honors the many accomplishments of Wilma Mankiller through the establishment of a fellowship named after her. Fellows are selected through a competitive application and interview process.

For over a decade, the Wilma Mankiller Fellowship has provided young Native professionals with invaluable skills and expertise in various policy and research areas that advance NCAI’s mission to protect and expand tribal sovereignty. Fellows gain experience in policy advocacy, applied research, program development, community outreach, communications and other key areas of NCAI’s work.

NCAI has graduated nearly 60 Fellows over the program’s existence. During 2015-2016, NCAI hosted three fellows working on various projects and legislative priorities: Tamera Begay (Navajo Nation), Jalene Herron (Yup’ik), and Mike LaValley (Blackfeet Nation). The 2015-2016 cohort focused on a number of issues such as Native Vote, Indian Education, workforce development, and public safety.

In the summer of 2016, NCAI welcomed a new cohort: Teressa Baldwin, (Inupiaq, Kiana Traditional Council), Elijah Moreno (Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation), Whitney Sawney (Cherokee Nation), and Concetta Tsosie de Haro (Navajo Nation). The Fellows work side by side with tribal and national leaders, building the capacity and networks to develop influential careers in Indian Country advocacy.

“NCAI has given me a place to learn how policy shapes Indian Country and Alaska Native communities. My goal of returning home to rural Alaska and giving back to my community grows through each experience.”

– Teressa Baldwin, 2016-2017 Fellow
The Fellows also engaged with key NCAI staff members to learn about the history of NCAI, its role in advancing Indian Country’s health policy priorities, and how NCAI’s Policy Research Center supports this advocacy effort through the generation and coordination of relevant data about Native health, health disparities, and the root causes driving those disparities.

This year’s NCAI Native Graduate Health Fellows are Alastair Bitsoi (Navajo Nation), Robert Fulwider (Round Valley Indian Tribes), Brittany Jock (Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe/Mohawks of Akwesasne), Steven Just (Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate), Brandi Payton (Cherokee Nation), and Tara Wak Wak (Nez Perce Tribe).

NCAI deeply appreciates the generous support of Robert Burnette and the Seventh Day Adventist Church for establishing and sustaining the endowment that supports this fellowship.

Launched in 2012, the Native Graduate Health Fellowship program is part of NCAI’s commitment to equip the next generation of Native leaders with the skills, knowledge, and tools that they need to succeed. The Fellowship aims to address the stark disparities in Native health by building a pipeline of Native health professionals, prepared to lead in formulating and promoting health policies and practices that address the unique needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Undergoing a competitive application process and review, six Fellows were selected to take part in a professional development regimen and receive a monetary award towards their graduate studies. This year’s cohort met in Washington, DC in July 2016 to deepen their understanding about tribal sovereignty, tribal public policy, Native health policy, and recent innovations in Native health.

Over four days in the nation’s capital, the Fellows met with federal officials and representatives of national Native health policy advocacy organizations, notable among them a luncheon conversation with IHS Principal Deputy Director Mary Smith. They toured the White House, the National Institutes of Health, and federal agencies that play critical roles in Native health policy and the provision of Native healthcare services.

“NCAI seeks to increase the number of Native health leaders and equip them with the tools necessary to achieve our vision of strong, healthy Native communities.”

– Jacqueline Pata, NCAI Executive Director
2015 ANNUAL CONVENTION AND MARKETPLACE

THRIVING COMMUNITIES, DRIVING OPPORTUNITIES

The tribes of the Pacific Region hosted NCAI’s 72nd Annual Convention & Marketplace in San Diego, CA from October 18-23, 2015. The Convention’s theme of “Thriving Communities, Driving Opportunities” was a call to remember that our communities, when they are healthy and vibrant, create new and exciting opportunities for our people.

Speakers from the White House, members of Congress, the U.S. Department of the Interior, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, the Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Office of Special Trustee for American Indians, Office of Tribal Justice, U.S. Department of Justice, and National native organizations addressed tribal leaders in attendance during seven general assemblies. One session featured interactive discussion between tribal leaders, youth, and other attendees in a World Café format about leading community change.

“We are the driving forces of opportunity for our nations, our communities and ourselves.” – Brian Cladoosby, NCAI President

NCAI provided an update on tribal cases appearing before the U.S. Supreme Court relating to the scope of tribal jurisdiction, reservation diminishment, and the reliability of tribal court decisions. Tribal leaders were called upon to take action with their respective state attorney generals and Congressional delegations.

During the Fourth General Assembly, Harvard University’s Honoring Nations program presented a special plenary session to celebrate successes in tribal governance. The 2015 Honoring Nations finalists each shared a 10-minute presentation about their inspiring and innovative work.

Native youth show their commitment to good health at the National Native American Just Move It! Healthy Lifestyles Walk, Run and Rally at the 2015 NCAI Annual Convention.
Over 60 engaging breakout sessions, committee meetings, and caucuses provided an excellent forum for discussion during the week. Emerging themes during the convention focused around the work necessary to create tangible outcomes and solutions for Indian Country in the areas of climate change, sacred sites, health sovereignty, child welfare, water rights, food sovereignty, education and more.

Presidential candidates were given time to address attendees. “NCAI’s mission is to advocate on behalf of Indian Country. We will do this no matter who is in the White House,” said NCAI Executive Director Jacqueline Pata.

NCAI members also elected NCAI’s leadership by private ballot at the Convention. Brian Cladoosby, Chairman of the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community, was re-elected for a second term as NCAI President. Other officers elected were the First Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer as well as the Area Vice Presidents and Alternate Area Vice Presidents.

The NCAI Youth Commission had a packed agenda during the week, participating in their own sessions as well as the main Convention agenda, providing them excellent leadership training for experiences they can take into the future. Sessions for the Youth Commission included financial capability, removing harmful mascots from public schools, making the most of social media tools, a career roundtable discussion, and what it means to be a tribal leader. A Department of Education session to learn more about the White House Initiative on American Indian/Alaska Native Education was also on their agenda for the week.

Native Vote was woven throughout the week’s activities, notably the energetic Native Vote Talent Show/Lip Sync Battle evening event. There was also a Native Vote session on ways that tribal nations and communities can protect voters, engage particular groups like elders and veterans, and encourage Native candidates to run for office.

Other highlights during the week included the National Native American Just Move It! Healthy Lifestyles Walk, Run and Rally, the Gala Banquet featuring musical artist Keith Secola, and the Youth and Elders Honoring Luncheons.

More than 60 resolutions were passed out of the Convention, which will inform and guide NCAI’s advocacy work as a consensus organization for Indian Country.
Several hundred tribal leaders, NCAI tribal delegates, Congressional leaders, and members of President Obama’s Administration came together in Washington, DC from February 22-25, 2016 to engage in a substantive dialogue about the key policy issues impacting tribal nations. Sixteen members of Congress addressed session attendees, along with ten Administration officials.

During the 1st General Assembly, NCAI President Brian Cladoosby and NCAI Executive Director Jacqueline Pata both stressed the need to seize on the favorable political climate during the final months of the 114th Congress and the Obama Administration to advance key legislative and administrative priorities that will benefit Indian Country for years to come. Meanwhile, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Gina McCarthy spoke passionately about the importance of supporting tribal sovereignty and the “leaps forward” that the EPA has made in Indian policy over the past three decades. She also announced a new climate change app created by Local Environmental Observer (LEO) Network, which has grown from an Alaska-based network into a nation-wide network of hundreds of participants who are helping Indian Country enhance community resilience by reporting changes at the local level using traditional knowledge.

Three key themes dominated the conversation during the convening: (1) unity and community collaboration (including inter-tribal collaboration, Democrat to Republican bi-partisanship, and tribal-federal consultation); (2) advocacy and education (encouraging tribal leaders to make the voices of their nations heard in order to help educate policymakers to make the best decisions for Indian Country); and (3) the power of the Native vote. Highlighting the critical importance of encouraging Native people to vote in federal, state, local, and tribal elections, always humorous Senator Al Franken (D-MN) declared, “I was elected by 312 votes, I’m sure it was you guys!”

The jam-packed session agenda featured listening sessions with federal agencies on environmental protection, fee-to-trust and rights-of-way issues, climate change, and workforce development. Also during the session, NCAI Elections Committee Chair Juanita Ahtone swore in several NCAI Executive Committee Officers not sworn in at the 2015 Annual Convention, including new First Vice President Fawn Sharp (Quinault Indian Nation).

On February 23rd, NCAI held an evening banquet ceremony to commemorate its 18th Annual Leadership Awards, which honor individuals who have made a transformative impact in and for Indian Country. The 2016 Awardees were U.S. Representative Betty McCollum (Congressional Leadership Award); Former Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs Kevin Washburn (Government...
Leadership Award); Alaska Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott (Native American Leadership Award); ESPN writer Mike Wise (Public Sector Leadership Award); Blackhorse v. Pro Football, Inc. attorney Jesse Witten (Special Recognition Award); and former NCAI Partnership for Tribal Governance Director Sherry Salway Black (Special Recognition Award).

Reflecting on the distinguished group of awardees, NCAI President Cladoosby remarked, “It is important to recognize those that support and stand up for Indian Country. These awardees are true champions for Indian Country and I am honored to have them standing with us.” In accepting her award, Sherry Salway Black announced she was providing NCAI with a $500 check to start a NCAI Youth Membership Fund, which was matched by the First Nations Development Institute. Before the night was over, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, and Swinomish Indian Tribal Community also accepted Black’s challenge to match the funds.

Also during the banquet, NCAI awarded plaques to its 2015 Tribal Exchange Stock Market Game winners: Avery Black and Jovan Grandson, citizens of the Navajo Nation and seniors attending Monument Valley High School in Arizona. Black and Grandson were given their awards by a surprise special guest, Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye. The Stock Exchange competition is designed to teach financial capability skills to Native students in grades 4-12 at no cost through funding from the Bureau of Indian Education.

“NCAI improves our world one person, one community at a time. That’s why when you speak, we listen. That’s because when you speak for the community, the word unity is in it. It’s the oath we take every day—liberty and justice for all.”

– Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), U.S. House of Representatives
Nearly 1,000 participants attended the Mid Year Conference & Marketplace in Spokane, WA from June 27-30, 2016. During the week’s general assemblies, conference attendees were addressed by representatives from Congress, The White House, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. General Services Administration, Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, U.S. Census Bureau, and U.S. Department of Interior, as well as several prominent tribal leaders and partner organizations.

The 11th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum (TLSF) was held on Wednesday, June 29 during the Second General Assembly. Presenters gave examples of how tribal nations are using data to improve outcomes for their citizens in areas including education, fisheries, census data, and more.
Three themes were identified during the Tribal Scholar Response given by Desi Rodriguez-Lonebear: 1) growing data warriors among our youth, 2) what tribes are doing to drive their respective nations, and 3) how data is being used to tell each tribe’s own stories.

Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell closed out the Second General Assembly, reflecting on her time as Secretary and the work still left to do. “Education, energy, environment, climate change, and natural resources, we have worked together on all of these issues. Tribes have made strides. [Interior’s] North Star is self-determination and self-governance. I believe actions speak louder than words.” Jewell also emphasized the importance for tribal leaders to advocate their issues to Congressional members to pass laws in support of sovereignty.

NCAI members heard an update on the recent U.S. Supreme court decisions upholding tribal sovereignty in Dollar General v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and U.S. v. Bryant. “Your work and collective investment in tribal courts in paying off,” said Larry Roberts, Acting Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs. NCAI’s annual report provides greater detail on these decisions in the Tribal Supreme Court Project update on pages 45-46.

The substantive breakout sessions included in-depth conversations on scientific data and what that means for tribal sovereignty. Other sessions included discussions about the importance of Native Vote, trust modernization, economic development climates, tribal citizenship, food sovereignty, and Native youth program execution. An important component of the Mid Year Conference is the resolutions process, and 40 resolutions were passed in 2016 in Spokane to help guide NCAI’s advocacy work.

Other highlights from the week included the Sunrise Ceremony in observance of Native sacred places, a tradeshow with great tribal resource information, and wonderful variety of Native arts and crafts vendors which featured a Tule Mat Lodge, the traditional home of the Columbia plateau tribes.

A warm Welcome Reception on the rooftop patio treated attendees to tribal crab and salmon, and the Cultural Night shared the generosity and hospitality of the Northwest Regional Local Planning Committee.

“[Interior’s] North Star is self-determination and self-governance. I believe actions speak louder than words.”

– Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell
NCAI’S EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

NCAI is honored to be a strong and consistent voice in Washington, DC for tribal nations. As the representative for our tribal members, NCAI works to ensure that the interests of Indian Country are considered at every stage of the advocacy process.

In Congress, NCAI focuses our advocacy work on issues brought forward by our tribal members, such as restoring tribal homelands, preserving our natural resources, trust modernization, climate change, tribal infrastructure, public safety, health, education, and economic development, among others. NCAI promotes passage of legislation that will have a sustained and significant impact on tribal communities. See NCAI’s Policy Update for the latest activity.

Once legislation is enacted, NCAI’s advocacy efforts turn to ensuring that laws are implemented as intended by Congress. NCAI has worked with tribes and the Administration to ensure that tribes are informed and able to participate in initiatives such as trust reform; prosecution of non-Indians under Violence Against Women Act provisions; the HEARTH Act; and self-governance expansion at the Department of Transportation.

In addition, NCAI has advocated for advancement in programs that will improve the lives of tribal members. Examples include advocating for strengthening protections under the Indian Child Welfare Act; expansion of Community Health Aide Programs throughout Indian Country; increasing co-management opportunities for tribes over natural resources; and expansion of Violence Against Women provisions to affected youth.

NCAI works diligently throughout each year to achieve prosperity through sovereignty for tribal members and nations.

RESTORING TRIBAL LAND

Previous policies of allotment, assimilation and virtual moratoriums on restoring tribal homelands continue to have profound negative impacts on tribal communities. Restoration of tribal homelands remains a top priority for Indian Country so that tribes can exercise true self-sufficiency and provide for the economic and infrastructure needs of tribal communities. Following the Supreme Court’s decision in Carcieri v. Salazar in
2009, NCAI has strongly advocated for Congress to pass legislation to reaffirm the Secretary of the Interior’s authority to take lands into trust for all tribes; and reaffirm the status of current lands held in trust for tribes.

In the Administration, President Obama set a goal of restoring half a million acres of tribal homelands into trust during his Administration. To date, the Administration has placed nearly 400,000 acres into trust and is on track to meet its goal before the end of the Administration.

NCAI continues to support tribal, Congressional, and Administration efforts to reverse the impacts of prior policies that resulted in large land losses for tribes.

**TRUST MODERNIZATION**

NCAI worked with partner organizations and tribes on a major step forward in tribal self-determination over trust land management. Indian lands and natural resources are a primary source of economic activity for tribal communities, but the antiquated and inefficient federal trust resource management system contributes to the anemic condition of many reservation economies. On June 22, 2016 Public Law 114-178, the Indian Trust Asset Management Reform Act, was signed into law by President Obama. The Act establishes an Indian trust asset Demonstration Project, in addition to other provisions empowering tribes to better manage their own trust assets.

The primary feature of the new law is a Demonstration Project that empowers tribes to develop plans for trust asset management with tribal objectives and priorities. The tribal plan and regulations, when approved by the Secretary of the Interior, can authorize the tribe to engage in surface leasing, forest management, and appraisals without any further approval of the Secretary.

The new law also authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to create the position of Under Secretary for Indian Affairs to supervise and coordinate trust functions that are now separate in the Office of the Special Trustee (OST), Bureau of Indian Affairs, and other divisions of Interior. Further, the Secretary of the Interior is required to consult with tribes and develop a plan for the future of the OST.

NCAI’s support of this legislative effort came directly from our Executive Committee recognizing the need to strengthen the focus on trust modernization. NCAI’s membership passed Resolution ECWS-14-007 in early 2014 creating a Trust Modernization Workgroup, tasked with reviewing the current system and making recommendations for improvement.

Since that time, NCAI has hosted breakout sessions at every conference seeking the guidance of our tribal leadership and the expertise within Indian Country. The 2015 Annual Convention featured a “Strategy Session on Legislative and Administrative Efforts to Modernize Land Into Trust, Trust Asset Management, and the Trust Relationship”. At the 2016 Mid Year Conference, the workgroup discussed "Advancing Trust Reform in Indian Country Beyond the 2016 Election".

From those sessions and in conjunction with national and regional partners, a set of draft trust modernization principles and priorities has been developed to benefit tribes across Indian Country. The aim of the principles is to move the trust system and trust relationship into the 21st Century, to recognize that tribes are in best position to address the needs of their communities and allow tribes to fully exercise self-governance and self-determination.
NCAI and the workgroup are continuing to work on short-term goals that the current Administration can enact to reinforce tribal sovereignty, strengthen trust standards, improve tribal-federal relations, and to fully-fund federal Indian programs and services. NCAI will continue this historic effort to help improve the trust land management systems and modernize the trust relationship to better serve the needs of Indian Country into the next Administration.

**TRIBAL LABOR SOVEREIGNTY ACT**

NCAI advocates for tribal parity as governments, including the area of labor relations. NCAI has worked with Congress on passage of the Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act (TLSA) which will include tribal governments in the same exempt category as all governments. Tribal governments need the authority that other governments have to regulate labor to suit their economic climate, and ensure that tribal governmental programs are not interrupted due to labor issues. The TLSA has passed the House and is now in the Senate for action. NCAI will continue its efforts to secure passage of tribal labor relations legislation during this session of Congress.

The issue of labor has also been the subject of litigation and NCAI has provided legal support in the form of amicus briefs for the Chickasaw Nation, Saginaw Chippewa, and the Little River Band. NCAI will continue its strong advocacy efforts in the Congress and the Courts to ensure that tribes achieve governmental parity in labor issues.

**CHILD WELFARE**

NCAI remains strongly committed to working collaboratively with national organizations, tribal and state governments, advocates, the Administration and others to uphold the essential and effective policies and practices of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

Proper implementation of ICWA requires continued vigilance, resources, advocacy and consistency. In the past several years, ICWA has become a target for those who seek to undermine ICWA's protections and have ICWA declared unconstitutional.

NCAI works in partnership with tribal governments and through the ICWA Defense Project with the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA), the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) and the ICWA Appellate Clinic at Michigan State University College of Law, as well as others, to provide communication strategies, legal responses and updates to tribes and other interested partners on ICWA issues. For example, we help in drafting amicus curiae briefs. In the media, we have supported statements calling for informed and balanced responses to ICWA cases. As an organization, our members passed resolution SD-15-010 pledging to defend ICWA.

At the 2015 Annual Convention, NCAI hosted a workshop on 'Fashioning an ICWA Advocacy Plan for your Tribe' and members heard an ICWA update. NCAI offered a session at the 2016 Mid-Year Conference on 'Leadership's Challenge to Improve the Indian Child Welfare Act for the Next Generation'. At the 2016 NCAI Annual Convention, tribal leaders discussed their role in promoting child welfare and family wellness.

In the Administration, the Department of the Interior heard from NCAI, our partner organizations and tribal leaders about the need for updated ICWA guidelines to bring increased compliance and consistency in how state courts and agencies are applying ICWA.
In June 2016, the Department of Interior took action and published its Final Rule on ICWA which establishes legally binding regulations ensuring state courts and state agencies abide by ICWA’s minimum federal standards. These federal standards protect the interests of Native children, their families and tribes involved in state court proceedings. These regulations are set to become effective on December 12, 2016. These regulations, which have the force of law, should greatly improve state court compliance with ICWA’s mandates.

Through collaboration, NCAI will continue the ongoing work of protecting Native children and promoting healthy families and communities.

**NATURAL RESOURCES**

Tribes hold central to their values the preservation of the resources that sustain them, and have nurtured, lived, and thrived off their homelands for centuries. Native peoples continue to rely on their natural resources to sustain themselves as key elements of their culture.

**Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and DAPL**

NCAI stands with Standing Rock in protecting its water, sacred places and the natural resources that tribes seek to sustainably manage, and pass to their descendants.

The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe has been embroiled in a battle against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), which threatens the tribe’s water supply and sacred places. The 1,168-mile pipeline will stretch from North Dakota and transport over 570,000 gallons of crude oil per day while crossing under the Lake Oahe, just a half-mile from the Standing Rock Indian Reservation.

This pipeline was approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers without satisfying federal statutes requiring tribal consultation, and the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe was excluded from the cultural survey process until after surveys were completed.

The Tribe sued the Army Corps of Engineers, and sought to halt the issuance of the easement and construction of the pipeline until it can ensure the protection of its waters and sacred places. NCAI assisted Standing Rock in connecting a rapidly-growing partnership of tribes, organizations, and members of the public who called for a halt to construction, and demanded increased tribal consultation on projects with such a potential impact to tribal resources.

A Washington, DC federal judge ruled on September 9, 2016 that construction could proceed. However, within minutes, the Departments of Justice, Army and the Interior issued a joint statement that they wouldn’t authorize pipeline construction on the Corps’ land near or under Lake Oahe in North Dakota until the Army Corps reconsiders important issues raised by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and other tribal nations.

It was a remarkable result of the historic collective action of more than 200 tribes to stand together and speak with one voice. NCAI is honored to be a part of the collaborative network that #StandsWithStandingRock.

**Climate Change**

American Indians and Alaska Natives are disproportionately impacted by climate change due to the geographical areas in which they reside and their direct connection to their surrounding environments. Tribes’ cultures, traditions, lifestyles, communities, foods, and economies are all dependent upon many natural resources and they are disappearing faster than they can be restored. Native peoples who rely heavily on the cultural and subsistence practices of their ancestors to survive are particularly impacted. Specifically, the well-established plight of those in Alaska Native villages is probably the most profound manifestation of the climate crisis and requires focused, high priority attention from the federal government.

At the end of 2014, the White House Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience released its report and recommendations for the Administration, including a report with additional tribal specific principles requesting: (1) tribal access to federal agencies’ data and information related to climate change; (2) removal of barriers that prohibit tribal access to federal programs; (3) direct access to federal funding; and (4) the establishment of a permanent federal government Climate Adaption Task Force.
The work of NCAI helps protect resources vital to tribal cultures and communities.

NCAI is working to make sure the tribal principles are implemented. Further, we are working with tribal leaders, partner organizations, and climate change experts to ensure that the federal government improves methods to provide tribal access to federal programs and funding opportunities that address climate change impacts and planning as well as recognize the role of traditional ecological knowledge in federal policy.

Energy

Indian lands and natural resources are a primary source of economic activity for tribal communities. Tribal energy resources are vast, largely untapped, and critical to America’s efforts to achieve energy security and independence, reduce greenhouse gases, and promote economic development. Energy development is integral to tribal efforts to generate jobs and to improve tribal citizens’ standard of living. The Department of the Interior estimates that undeveloped traditional energy reserves on Indian lands could generate up to $1 trillion for tribes and surrounding communities. Further, the Department of Energy estimates that tribal wind resources could provide 32 percent of the total U.S. electricity demand, and tribal solar resources could generate twice the total amount of energy needed to power the country.

However, the current federal trust resource management system places barriers to energy development on tribal lands which do not exist elsewhere. Cumbersome bureaucratic processes, disincentives for tribal financing, inequitable exclusion from federal programs, and the requirement that tribes and tribal businesses obtain approval from the Department of the Interior for almost every step of energy development on tribal lands—

including the approval of business agreements, leases, rights of way, and appraisals—continue to delay energy development in Indian Country.

NCAI continues the work to increase the ability of tribes to manage their natural resources through legislative and administrative changes. This year we’ve worked on legislation aimed to improve tribal management and control over renewable and traditional energy development to help create careers and capital in Indian Country.

TRIBAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Housing

Housing is a core necessity for tribal communities, and is the engine of prosperity for tribal nations. While tribes have made great strides toward improving housing conditions in their communities through the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act of 2008 (NAHASDA), the need for adequate, affordable housing for Indian communities persists. Native Americans still face some of the worst housing and living conditions in the United States. According to the American Community Survey 2006-2010 data, Indian homes frequently lack utilities and infrastructure, with approximately 8.6 percent lacking complete plumbing facilities; 7.5 percent lacking kitchen facilities; and 18.9 percent lacking telephone service.

NCAI’s efforts around housing have focused on reauthorization of NAHASDA and addressing homelessness in Indian Country. NCAI continues to advocate for reauthorization of NAHASDA, which expired in September of 2013. NAHASDA authorizes and administers Indian housing programs within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for American Indian and Alaskan Natives to provide safe and decent housing. NCAI and the NCAI Task Force on NAHASDA Reauthorization have been working jointly with the National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) to bring together tribal leaders and tribal housing entities to advocate for passage of this critical legislation.
STRENGTHENING SOVEREIGNTY

Through meetings on Capitol Hill, testifying for adequate funding, sessions at NCAI conferences, supporting consultations on homelessness, and in speaking engagements, NCAI encourages Congressional and Administrative action.

With few resources allocated to addressing the need for housing for tribal governments, homelessness continues to plague tribes as well as individual tribal citizens and Veterans located in urban centers. Tribes need funding and empowerment to address this issue, include housing rental options and homeless shelters for Veterans and low income people who do not qualify for NAHASDA programs.

In addition, many tribal communities are faced with challenges of recruiting and retaining highly qualified personnel to work on tribal lands because of the lack of housing and homeownership opportunities afforded to them.

NCAI is working on addressing housing issues with HUD, tribal leaders and members of NCAI, other national organizations, and the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Transportation

NCAI advocates strongly for increased funding and for the federal government to uphold their responsibility in maintaining transportation infrastructure. Even though they are the primary means of access to American Indian and Alaska Native communities, the thousands of miles of roadways in Indian Country are still among the most underdeveloped and unsafe road networks in the nation.

NCAI continues to work with tribes and to ensure the implementation of the Fixing America’s Surface Transportation Act of 2015 (FAST Act); advancing tribal sovereignty by expanding the self-governance program throughout the U.S. Department of Transportation and to strengthen the roads infrastructure because it is essential to the development and successes of tribal economies.

NCAI has recently collaborated with the Tribal Budget Interior Council BIA Road Maintenance Task Force to assist in the increase federal appropriation for the maintenance of BIA-owned roads and to address the backlog of BIA deferred maintenance.

Telecommunications

The U.S. continues to be a global leader in the technology and wireless industries. However, access to telecommunications infrastructure and services in rural and tribal lands continues to lag behind the nation overall. While various federal efforts have focused on increasing connectivity to underserved areas, tribal lands still remain the least connected areas of the country and experience significant barriers in policy and investment to deploy affordable and robust telecommunications services.

Advocacy efforts in the Congress have centered on reauthorization of the Federal Communications Commission and educating Members on the disparities that have persisted on tribal lands. Through written testimony and meetings with Congress, NCAI has encouraged members to ensure that tribal communities are part of the progress made in how telecommunication services are offered to underserved communities so the digital divide can be bridged for tribal governments.

NCAI has emphasized the need to remove the regulatory, legal, and financial barriers to broadband deployment on tribal lands. NCAI will continue to work with Congress to advance policies that increase access and funding for telecommunications deployment on tribal lands.

A number of proposed rulemakings were also advanced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) this year. NCAI participated in filings and meetings to protect the Tribal Land Bidding Credit and Small Business Designated Entity program in spectrum auctions; advocated for the preservation and increase of the enhanced Tribal Lifeline
subsidy to support broadband services for low-income members residing on tribal lands; and urged the FCC to create a tribal mechanism to financially support the deployment of telecommunications infrastructure in high-cost areas such as tribal lands.

NCAI will continue its work to ensure tribes are included in the overhaul and reform of the Universal Service Fund programs and that tribal lands are receiving eligible subsidies to obtain and maintain next-generation telecommunications services.

**Homeland Security and Emergency Management**

NCAI worked with tribes, partners and policymakers to amend the Stafford Act in 2013, which authorized tribal leaders to directly seek a federal disaster declaration. This has proved to be a benefit to tribal communities in disaster response and recovery, and resulted in better delivery of resources and quicker decision-making.

NCAI has been working with tribes and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in implementation of the law, and to date, eight tribes have been approved for Major Disaster Declaration, five have been denied, and one has had an Emergency Declaration Denial. The current FEMA Tribal Policy is under review for renewal and NCAI will provide comments.

NCAI submitted a statement to the DHS Advisory Committee Grants Task Force in December 2015, calling for tribal inclusion in task forces and workgroups, financial and technical support for basic emergency management capacity, and modification of DHS grant criteria for greater eligibility of tribal governments. NCAI has continued to work with the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and its newly created Tribal Working Group to ensure that tribal concerns are addressed. Key issues include efforts to secure U.S. international borders and funding dedicated to southwest border security for the next 10 years. NCAI continues to maintain its strong representation on the DHS SAFECOM Committee and the FirstNet Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC).

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

The public safety problems that continue to plague tribal communities are the result of decades of gross underfunding for tribal criminal justice systems; a uniquely complex jurisdictional scheme; and the historic failure by the federal government to fulfill its public safety obligations on American Indian and Alaska Native lands.

Addressing these challenges is a priority for NCAI, and over the past year our advocacy has focused on four key areas:

**Tribal Law & Order Act Reauthorization**

NCAI has worked with Congress to develop a reauthorization bill for the Tribal Law & Order Act of 2009 (TLOA). TLOA took a much-needed, comprehensive approach to improving public safety on Indian reservations and reforming the entire justice system in Indian Country—from prevention, to law enforcement, to courts, to detention, and rehabilitation. Many of the key components of the TLOA expired in 2014 and NCAI is working to craft legislation that would build upon the original act and further enhance public safety in tribal communities.

**Tribal Criminal Jurisdiction**

NCAI has been working with members of Congress to develop legislation that would pave the way for the
exercise of tribal jurisdiction over a broader class of crimes. The Violence Against Women Act of 2013 (VAWA 2013) included a provision that created a framework for tribes to exercise criminal jurisdiction over certain non-Indians who commit domestic or dating violence for the first time since the Supreme Court’s decision in *Oliphant v. Suquamish* in 1978.

Several tribes have been exercising this jurisdiction and have been able to hold offenders accountable who had been committing crimes with impunity for years. The limited scope of the VAWA 2013 provision, however, leaves many victims of crime in Indian Country without adequate protection. A bill was recently reported favorably by the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs that would reaffirm tribal jurisdiction in child abuse cases and drug cases, among other crimes.

**Tribal Access to the Crime Victims Fund**

The promise of the TLOA and VAWA 2013 will not be fully realized until sufficient funds are appropriated for tribal justice and victim services systems. NCAI has been advocating for increased funding across the board, and has placed special emphasis on securing tribal access to the Crime Victims Fund (CVF), which is the federal government’s primary mechanism for funding crime victim compensation and services across the country. Funds from the CVF currently flow to state and territorial governments and tribes are effectively left out.

Congress tripled the funding coming from the CVF to $2.6 billion, but did not direct any of this funding to tribal governments, whose citizens are the most victimized population in the country. NCAI has been aggressively fighting in the House and Senate to address this omission. As a result, there are currently both authorizing and appropriations bills pending that would create a 5% allocation for tribal governments from the CVF, amounting to nearly $145 million to potentially be directed to tribal governments.

**Juvenile Justice**

For decades, tribal leaders have encouraged a more proactive and humane approach to juvenile justice that is focused on prevention and mentoring and rehabilitation rather than criminalization and incarceration. NCAI
strongly believe that we owe it to our youth and future generations to focus resources on our young people from the outset, rather than waiting for them to go astray and then begin the cycle of institutionalization and incarceration that has proven to be so ineffective. NCAI has worked with a coalition of groups to develop legislative proposals consistent with these priorities for inclusion in the reauthorization of both the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and the Tribal Law & Order Act.

HEALTH AND EDUCATION

This past year NCAI continued its advocacy efforts ensuring that all Indian people have access to affordable and quality health care.

NCAI works in collaboration with tribal leaders, partners, stakeholders, and Indian Health Service (IHS) officials to improve IHS delivery of efficient and effective health care. There is a pathway to ensuring long-term solutions by creating opportunities for a staffing pipeline by reforming the scholarship program, putting in place management training for IHS staff, and reforming the purchase/referred care system to enhance opportunities for external staffing and services where they are currently lacking.

Affordable Care Act

The National Indian Health Outreach and Education (NIHOE) initiative was created to conduct outreach and education to tribes, tribal members, and Indian health care administrators on the American Indian and Alaska Native special benefits and protections offered under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), as well as the requirements and opportunities available to tribal employers.

Working to provide effective and permanent relief for Tribes from the employer shared responsibility mandate (“employer mandate”), NCAI has advocated that the Administration and the Internal Revenue Service delay the implementation of the employer mandate for tribes and tribal organizations, allowing Tribes additional time to seek a permanent legislative remedy to the employer mandate.

Mary Smith (center), Deputy Director of the Indian Health Service, meets with the 2016 NCAI Native Graduate Health Fellows and NCAI staff.
Community Health Aide Program

NCAI has worked to ensure that tribal governments have alternate means of healthcare to provide for their members. Tribes have been leading the way in health aide programs that offer culturally appropriate programs that deliver successful healthcare outcomes for tribal members. Examples of these programs include the Community Health Aide Program (CHAP) which includes nursing aides, behavioral health aides, and Dental Health Aide Therapists (DHAT) to support tribal communities as they seek to achieve quality and effective health care.

Education

An investment in education equips the future leaders of tribal governments because there is no more vital resource to the continued existence of tribal nations than Native children.

NCAI and its Native education partners, including the National Indian Education Association and the American Indian Higher Education Consortium, work together to develop and advocate on an array of educational topics including Native language revitalization, increased use of culture in the classroom, a heightened role for Tribal Education Associations, and improved graduation rates for Native students.

Sessions in support of education at NCAI’s conferences over the past year include meetings of the Native Languages Working Group; a session on ‘Higher Education and Tribal Communities’ and an Education Update at the 2015 Annual Convention; a Department of Education update at the 2016 Executive Council Winter Session; providing a venue for the Department of Education tribal consultation; and sessions on ‘Partnering for Student Success’ and ‘Creating Community Climates for Higher Education’ at the 2016 Mid Year Conference.

NCAI will continue to advocate for Indian Country’s priorities in the upcoming reauthorizations of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Higher Education Act reauthorization. In acknowledging that tribal nations are best suited to determine how their own youth are educated, and ensuring that Native languages and culture are an integral part of the curriculum, the federal government and tribal communities can provide a high-quality, holistic education to all Native students.

NCAI is working with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the Obama Administration, tribal leaders, and Congress on BIE reform to improve operations for both tribally-controlled and BIE operated schools. The BIE has held tribal consultation sessions, including an Information Session at NCAI’s 2015 Annual Convention.

Cultural Protections

Native cultures are intricately intertwined in many facets of identity, language, and religious practice. The protection of the diverse heritage of Native cultures involves complex administrative and legal structures. However, the primary responsibility to protect cultural and sacred places often falls to tribes who have the most at stake in preserving our ways of life for future generations. NCAI continues to prioritize its advocacy and education objectives to support the efforts of tribes to protect the religious freedoms and cultural practices of Native peoples.
NCAI has worked with tribes to protect historical and sacred places such as Badger Two Medicine in Montana, Bears Ears in Utah, and Oak Flat in Arizona, which are threatened by proposed non-Native mineral extraction and development that would cause irreparable damage to the lands. NCAI has also worked with the Pueblo of Acoma and other tribes who seek the return and repatriation of Native objects that have been illegally removed from tribal lands and are up for auction overseas. NCAI continues to seek enforcement measures under the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act to ensure that sacred items, objects, and remains are returned to tribes for proper burial rites and other religious practices.

NCAI will continue to work for the advancement of policies that respect and preserve Native cultures, while continuing to educate the public of our cultural rights.

**Native Veterans**

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is proposing to amend its regulations to allow the Secretary of VA to recognize tribal governments to establish organizations for the purposes of VA claims representations by Tribal Veteran Service Officers. The proposed rule would allow an employee of a tribal government to become accredited through a recognized State organization in a similar manner as a County Veterans’ Service Officer and become accredited through a recognized State organization.

NCAI is providing comments and strongly urges the Administration to implement regulations that acknowledge tribal sovereignty and provide benefit claims assistance to underserved American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.

NCAI continues to advocate for creation of Tribal Veterans Treatment Courts which would implement alternatives to incarceration when various factors such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or other physical or mental distress, may be the cause of veteran behavior. Veteran Treatment Courts are a cooperative effort between trial courts, prosecutors, defense counsel and the VA.

Many Native service members had state income tax illegally withheld from their military paychecks despite being exempt based on the Soldiers and Sailors Civil Relief Act. Only the state of New Mexico has attempted to provide relief, and NCAI has continued to advocate the injustice to the VA, Department of Justice and Congress. Also, NCAI is working with the National Museum of the American Indian on a proposed National Native American Veterans Memorial to be housed at the Museum.

**ECONOMY**

**Tax and Finance**

Under the current Tax Code, tribal governments are left without many of the benefits, incentives, and protections provided by the Code to state and local governments. This inequity significantly handicaps tribal sovereign authority to provide government revenue for tribal programs independent of federal appropriations and
encourage economic growth on tribal lands. NCAI is strongly committed to working with tribal leaders, technical experts, and federal agencies on strategies that empower tribes to raise governmental revenue and pursue economic and community development projects.

NCAI worked with legislators to develop “The Tribal Tax and Investment Reform Act of 2016,” which seeks to amend the federal tax code to ensure tribal governments are treated like state governments. The bill repeals limitations on tribal governments’ ability to issue tax-exempt bonds or to qualify as exempt from specific excise taxes to transactions involving the exercise of essential government functions.

Adopting new regulations would ensure the long term stability of tribal communities and meet the tax revenue needs of the tribes. NCAI has called for the Department of Interior to update the “Indian Trader Regulations” to meet the economic development and tax revenue needs of tribal governments. New regulations should pre-empt state taxation of Indian commerce; protect Indian Country value from state regulation, and preserve tribal taxation authority over Indian commerce, free from state interference.

NCAI has also urged Congress to consider tax credits for doctors employed by Indian Health Services facilities; enacting an amendment to remove the “Kiddie Tax” penalty from transfer of tribal funds to children and college students; including tribal governments in the Marketplace Fairness Act; establishing tribal empowerment zones; and granting tribes access to clean renewable energy bonds.

Budget and Appropriations

Tribes are assuming greater levels of government responsibility to meet their citizens’ needs in culturally appropriate ways, but receive exceptionally inadequate federal funding for roads, schools, police and various government services that were promised in treaties and under the federal trust responsibility. While the federal policy of supporting Indian self-determination and self-governance has been largely successful, the corresponding decentralized fiscal system between tribes and the federal government needs to be improved.

The ultimate outcome of the federal budget process has continually let tribes down. Tribes have faced the prospect of government shutdowns, a delayed budget process leading to continuing resolutions year after year, and sequestration, all of which has left the trust responsibility only partially fulfilled. These problems are due to political deadlock, the relatively small constituency that tribes represent in the U.S. political system, and a lack of accountability of whether the federal government is upholding its trust obligations.

NCAI continued coordinating advocacy on federal budget and appropriations in the last year on multiple fronts to address the urgent governmental revenue shortfalls throughout Indian Country. NCAI routinely publishes analyses of Administration proposals, Congressional activities, and budget formulation meetings to assist tribal leaders and planners in advocating for the fulfillment of trust obligations in the federal budget.

Tribal leaders at national conventions, federal budget consultations, and meetings with federal officials have requested up-to-date analyses of trends in federal spending on programs fulfilling the trust obligation to Indian tribes. In the last year, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights held briefings to hear from tribal leaders and organizations on the Commission’s update of the 2003 report, *A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country*. NCAI presented information on trends and the impact of funding shortfalls throughout Indian Country since the last report.

NCAI again published a national Indian Country budget request document, which laid the foundation for testimony and letters throughout the fiscal year (FY) 2017 appropriations cycle. The FY 2017 Indian Country Budget Request, “Upholding the Promises, Respecting Tribal Governance: For the Good of the People,” offered recommendations for ways the federal government, partnering with tribes, should meet the educational
needs of Indian youth; adequate health care for both direct and self-governance tribes; ensure responsible resource development; provide safe and secure tribal communities; and supply the long-term investments needed in tribal public infrastructure.

INTERNATIONAL ADVOCACY

Tribal nations are among the American family of governments, and have the same right to recognition in the international context as other global nations. NCAI holds consultative status with the UN, which allows us to participate in many UN meetings. Tribal communities are often on the front line of issues with global impact, such as climate change, and contribute indigenous knowledge to finding solutions at the international level.

NCAI has engaged on international Indigenous issues for many years through international forums, including the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS), to advance tribal interests when important policy decisions are under discussion at the international level.

United Nations- Climate Change

The Conference on Global Leadership in the Arctic: Cooperation, Innovation, Engagement and Resilience (GLACIER) was held in September 2015 in Anchorage, Alaska as a forum for circumpolar issues. Indigenous people make up about 10% of the circumpolar population. The summit was hosted by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who also chairs the eight-nation Arctic Council, and featured a call to action on climate change from U.S. President Barack Obama. The President was traveling on an historic visit to the state of Alaska, where he consulted with Alaska Natives on priorities and concerns in their communities.

Alaska Natives and American Indians have significantly contributed to discussions about changing landscapes due to climate change, and the resulting impacts on tribal communities and peoples. The dialogue at the GLACIER summit, with meaningful input from indigenous peoples, helped frame the conversation at the December 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, France.

The 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21) took place in Paris in December 2015, and the state parties arrived at the first ever universally binding accord on climate change – the Paris Agreement. Indigenous peoples from around the world, including NCAI and many tribal leaders from the U.S., participated in the negotiations and preparations leading up to the Paris Agreement.

In preparation for Paris, regional consultations of indigenous peoples took place in all seven regions of the world, including at NCAI’s annual conference. The advocacy of indigenous leaders was crucial for securing language concerning indigenous issues in the Agreement itself and the Decision adopting it. This language provides a solid foundation for continued advocacy going forward.

Organization of American States

NCAI participated actively in negotiation sessions to finalize the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the OAS, with the goal of securing a strong
regional Declaration that provides additional tools for protecting and promoting indigenous rights in the Americas. In June of 2016, nearly 30 years of negotiations resulted in the historic adoption of a Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the OAS.

**United Nations – World Conference on Indigenous Peoples**

Over the past year, there has been a great deal of follow-up work to the WCIP and NCAI, in partnership with the Native American Rights Fund, has been fully engaged in continuing to advocate with various UN bodies for meaningful action on our priorities. In 2014, the UN hosted the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). The WCIP included over 1,000 indigenous representatives from all over the world, as well as all 193 UN member countries. The purpose of the WCIP was for members of the UN and indigenous peoples to discuss implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Leading up to the WCIP, NCAI joined with tribes, inter-tribal associations, and partner organizations to advocate for four priorities:

1. Establishing an appropriate status for Indigenous governments at the UN;
2. Creating a UN mechanism to monitor and promote implementation of the UNDRIP;
3. Adopting measures to prevent violence against Indigenous women and children; and
4. Protecting sacred places and objects.

As an outcome of the WCIP, the UN General Assembly adopted an Outcome Document that provides for concrete and action-oriented measures to implement and achieve the objectives of the UNDRIP.

NCAI co-hosted an event during the 2016 session of the Commission on the Status of Women. The panel, “Indigenous Women’s Movements to End Violence Against American Indian, Alaska Native, and Aboriginal Women,” featured speakers from the U.S. and Canada, and examined best practices indigenous women in the United States and Canada have employed to organize and advocate for social changes and legal reforms to restore safety in their Native nations. In July 2016, the U.S., Canada and Mexico announced a collaborative initiative of North American Leaders to address violence against indigenous women and children, and address human trafficking.

Also in July 2016, NCAI joined representatives of the Native American Finance Officers Association (NAFOA) and tribal government leaders from four U.S. Indian tribes on a diplomatic exchange with government officials from Cuba. It was the first mission of its kind to Cuba, to create engaging and empowering dialogue to build collaborative partnerships through a mutual exchange of culture and economic understanding.

NCAI maintains a strong presence on the international stage, and hosts sessions on international advocacy at our Mid Year Conference and Annual Convention. We contribute the knowledge, experience and innovation of our members and of tribal nations to global conversations on indigenous rights.
In 1969, legendary Lakota scholar Vine Deloria, Jr. remarked in his seminal work *Custer Died for Your Sins* that the value of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) to Indian Country rested in its ability to serve as a “forum” in which tribal nations and leaders could discuss issues of common concern with one another and learn transferrable lessons from one another.

Deloria, who served as NCAI’s executive director from 1964 to 1967, also understood from firsthand experience that for NCAI to answer the call of its founders, it would need to serve the specific and often diverse needs of tribal nations as they worked to protect and exercise their sovereignty and treaty rights.

Central to this enduring mission is NCAI’s commitment to support the self-determined efforts of tribal nations to strengthen their governments, improve the quality of life in their communities, and create brighter futures for their citizens.

NCAI carries out this mission in several ways, from informing and supporting the growing movement among tribal nations to build their own research and data capacity to better understand the needs of their communities, to equipping tribal leaders and key decision-makers with the knowledge, tools, and tribally designed best practices they need to make informed decisions that advance their nations’ strategic priorities.

In the following pages, you will read an overview of how NCAI has worked to fulfill this mission of service to the community of tribal nations across the United States over the past year.

**NCAI POLICY RESEARCH CENTER (PRC)**

**Shifting the Storyline: Leading with Love and Hope**

The NCAI Policy Research Center (PRC) was established in 2004 to support Indian Country in shaping its own future by providing tribal leaders with the best available knowledge to inform their decision-making within a framework of Native wisdom to ensure the best futures for our peoples. As stewards of this mission, we aim to add value to the work of NCAI by highlighting the strengths of Native cultures, leveraging our successes to assist those in need, and making sure research produces positive benefits for tribal communities.

Over the past year, PRC has committed to using its work in research and data to advance a storyline of love and hope in order to inspire those we serve and celebrate the strengths of our people, while holding institutions accountable to affirm tribal sovereignty and produce positive health outcomes. In PRC’s project work and products, we commit to highlighting the successes of tribal nations and to fostering nation-to-nation sharing by disseminating information on model initiatives.
Our 2016 Strategic Priorities are to:

1. Develop resources to aid tribes in strengthening Native youth development and leadership;
2. Foster stronger tribal-state relations to ensure the meaningful exercise of sovereignty;
3. Leverage information and network resources to advance policy advocacy; and
4. Continue generating regional data and information resources.

In what follows, the staff of the PRC describe our efforts to steward the mission of NCAI over the past year. All PRC publications are available on the NCAI Policy Research Center website at www.ncai.org/prc.

Develop Resources to Aid Tribes in Strengthening Native Youth Development and Leadership

Informed Work to Ensure Federal Funding Addresses Unmet Needs: On February 19, 2016, NCAI released a written statement at the US Commission on Civil Rights Briefing to revisit its 2003 report, *A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country*, and develop a 2016 revision. This statement drew on new analysis developed by the PRC showing that most Indian-related spending areas continue to lag behind their non-Indian counterparts from FY 2000 to FY 2016.

Completed a Report on How to Improve Data on American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Youth and Families: With funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the PRC completed a report detailing the availability of existing federal data on family economic capability, access to opportunity, child health and wellness, and Native youth system involvement as part of an effort to improve the use of Kids Count data. As part of this project, we developed four state profiles for Alaska, Montana, New Mexico, and Oklahoma that highlighted strengths and challenges facing these states in supporting Native youth and their families.

Shared Information and Resources on Native Youth Resilience: In October 2015, the PRC disseminated our Research Update at the NCAI Annual Convention featuring research on Native youth resilience. We also shared insights from Native scholar Dr. Theresa LaFromboise in our Update at Executive Council Winter Session. At the Mid-Year Conference in June 2016 and our 2016 Annual Convention, we hosted sessions highlighting promising tribal and other youth-centered initiatives to promote youth resilience.

Foster Stronger Tribal-State Relations to Ensure the Meaningful Exercise of Sovereignty

Hosted the 11th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum: The PRC hosted the Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum at NCAI’s Mid Year Conference in Spokane, Washington. This session provides a space for tribal leaders and citizens, researchers, and policy organizations to discuss how to strengthen public policy and community-based initiatives.

EMPOWERING NATIVE COMMUNITIES

The “tribal data warriors” of the NCAI Policy Research Center, from L to R: Amber Ebarb, Sarah Pytalski, Dr. Malia Villegas, and Dr. Deana Around Him.
based on meaningful data and research. This year’s theme was “Changing Climates, Inspiring Hope: Using Research to Inform Systems,” and the Forum featured a morning plenary session and afternoon breakout sessions with panel presentations, research planning sessions, and a poster session. Sessions included those focused on improving tribal economies, partnerships with tribal colleges and universities, food sovereignty, training of Native scientists, citizenship, and Native youth resilience.

Completed Literature Review and Annotated Bibliography on AI/AN Data Disaggregation: With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the PRC completed a report summarizing the potential for disaggregating AI/AN demographic data, specifically at the state level. The report highlights ongoing data quality challenges that constrain accurate data disaggregation, notes the multiple “definitions of Indian” in use by federal agencies impacting the use of disaggregated data, and identifies some priority types of disaggregation that would be important in providing better access to existing AI/AN data.

Leverage Information and Network Resources to Advance Policy Advocacy

Submitted Comments on Process to Revise Major Policy to Protect Humans in Federal Research. On September 9, 2015, sixteen federal departments and agencies released a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) to revise the main policy for the protection of human subjects in research (DHHS 45 CFR 46), typically referred to as “the Common Rule.” There are significant implications for research with tribal nations and AI/AN peoples in these proposed revisions. NCAI’s NPRM Comment Submission highlighted concerns related to consent for secondary research with biospecimens, and research oversight by tribal Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), among other areas of concern.

Informing the Development of the 2020 Census. The U.S. Census Bureau is considering whether to add an enrollment question for Native Americans in the 2020 Census. The agency is conducting a test in two communities to assess the quality of the data collected using an enrollment question against tribal enrollment records. As a Census Information Center, we have been actively monitoring Census activities and have developed a few resources to assist tribal nations in informing the Census Bureau, including participating in a Native America Calling interview and disseminating a Census 2020 Information Brief. NCAI passed resolution SPO-16-043 at the Mid Year Conference opposing the use of such a question in the 2020 Census and in the American Community Survey.

Hosted Meeting of Tribal Epidemiology Center Staff and other Advocates to Discuss Diabetes and Its Co-Occurring Conditions: In July 2016, the NCAI PRC hosted a meeting of staff members of tribal epidemiology centers, intertribal health boards, urban Indian health organizations, and research universities to address diabetes’ linkages with cancer (reproductive, stomach, other), mental health (e.g., depression), and heart disease. Next steps include presenting priorities to policy leaders in Indian Health Service (IHS) and other U.S. Department of Health and Human Services agencies, as well as producing new analyses to inform research and prevention efforts. Our Tribal Insights Brief featuring initiatives working to prevent diabetes is available on our website.

Developed Information for Tribal Leaders on Human & Sex Trafficking: In response to rising concerns about the impact of trafficking on tribal citizens, the PRC produced a tribal insights brief highlighting trends and tribal codes addressing human and sex trafficking to inform the work of tribal nations.
Continue Generating Regional Data and Information Resources

Hosted Four Meetings Featuring our NARCH Project Resources to Improve Tribal-Academic Research Partnerships: As part of our Native American Research Center for Health project, we completed two pilot trainings in Anchorage, Alaska, at the Southcentral Foundation and in Rockville, Maryland, at the American Institutes for Research. We also presented at the Native Research Network in Cherokee, North Carolina, and at NCAI’s Mid Year Convention in Spokane, Washington. We finalized a contract to begin development of a game that would provide further access to this content as part of a highly-interactive experience.

Released Research Updates and Data Drum: The PRC released three Research Updates called the Data Drum – at NCAI’s 2015 Annual Convention, 2016 Executive Council Winter Session, and 2016 Mid Year Conference – to share policy research updates with NCAI members and disseminate best practices and resources to support and advance their work. We also released three editions of the Data Drum during the months between NCAI conferences to inform our networks of data tools and resources that can support their work. The PRC has grown our listserv to over 3,000 members, which include leaders and key decision-makers representing Native nations in the U.S., New Zealand, Canada, and Australia, as well as a wide range of federal partners and non-profit organizations.
NCAI PARTNERSHIP FOR TRIBAL GOVERNANCE (PTG)

PTG OVERVIEW

NCAI’s Partnership for Tribal Governance (PTG) is an investment in strengthening tribal governance. Answering the call of tribal leaders across Indian Country, NCAI established the PTG in 2009 to support tribal nations in their efforts to strengthen their governance systems and effectively exercise their sovereignty. The PTG serves as the organizational hub within NCAI to assist tribal governments and leaders in four core areas: strengthening governance, leadership development, citizen engagement, and public and media education.

Through its extensive network of partnerships with tribal nations, tribal intergovernmental and national Native organizations, academic and policy centers, practitioners, policymakers, and other groups, the PTG:

- develops and shares new knowledge and resources on tribal governance;
- facilitates increased governance education, training, and technical assistance opportunities for tribal leaders and key decision-makers;
- enhances communication, coordination, and collaboration among groups working to support the governance-strengthening efforts of tribal nations;
- informs and promotes a policy research agenda to strengthen tribal governance;
- advocates for policies that enhance tribal self-determination and self-governance;
- and educates the mainstream media and general public about tribal governments and their stories of success.

“I want to thank NCAI and the Northwest Area Foundation because for so long, our Indian employment and training programs have done so much with so little. None of that is captured in the numbers that are submitted to the federal agencies. The portrayal of these tribal initiatives that NCAI is documenting is going to tell that story.”

– Lorenda Sanchez, Executive Director, California Indian Manpower Consortium

Participants in the Small Business Sector of the Gila River Indian Community’s Career Pathways Program, 2014. (Photo courtesy of Gila River Indian News)
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING THE HUMAN CAPACITY TO REBUILD TRIBAL NATIONS

A growing number of tribal nations are designing innovative approaches to cultivate the abilities of their citizens to successfully pursue careers that will empower those nations to create the futures they seek. For the past 18 months, the PTG has been engaged in a project that works collaboratively with tribal nations to document their innovative approaches and share them with Indian Country. Supported by a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation, the project also seeks to identify common challenges, emerging trends, and effective strategies across tribal workforce development efforts.

As part of the project, the PTG is developing in-depth case studies of five tribal nations: the Coeur d’Alene Tribe, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Gila River Indian Community, Quinault Indian Nation, and Ysleta del Sur Pueblo. Accompanying the case studies are video recorded interviews and presentations featuring representatives of these nations explaining their innovative approaches to workforce development.

In addition, the PTG is producing a decision-making toolkit for tribal leaders and workforce development practitioners to use as they assess their workforce development approaches and determine how best to strengthen them. The toolkit will feature lessons learned, policy recommendations, and questions for tribal policy makers to consider regarding key aspects of workforce development.

Last but not least, the PTG has developed a policy brief featuring a comprehensive set of key recommendations for the federal government to consider as it supports tribal nations, Native organizations, and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) as they design, refine, and strengthen their workforce development efforts. The PTG compiled these recommendations through interviews and surveys it has conducted with tribal leaders and workforce development practitioners; a series of tribal workforce development sessions it convened at its conferences; its ongoing consultation with NCAI’s Tribal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Task Force and Economic Development, Finance, and Employment Subcommittee; and its participation in a December 2015 Workforce Development Roundtable convened by the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

The brief contends that tribal innovation is the springboard for tribal workforce development success. Thus it is the federal government’s responsibility to work...
closely with tribal nations and communities to identify and remove the obstacles that currently obstruct tribal innovation, as well as create new opportunities for tribal ingenuity to take root and flourish.

The PTG will share these and related resources on tribal workforce development through NCAI’s website, its YouTube channel, and several webinars beginning in October 2016.

INVESTMENTS IN STRENGTHENING TRIBAL GOVERNANCE

Since 2014, the PTG has been stewarding the investments it has made in the self-determined efforts of 11 tribal nations to strengthen their governance systems in key ways, from reforming constitutions to updating enrollment systems to conducting community needs assessments to inform tribal decision-making. These one-time investments, made possible by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, are beginning to bear fruit. Below are a few examples:

- **Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes**: The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) made significant headway towards achieving its longstanding goal of developing a comprehensive educational tracking system to assess the progress of CSKT students in K-12 and post-secondary education. When completed, this “Youth Success Tracking System” will feature a master database that tracks each youth’s age, summer activities, school attendance, and other metrics identified during a planning phase with community involvement. The gathered data will support policy change, identify behavioral patterns, and bridge the gap between youth, their parents/guardians, and education officials.

- **Saulte Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians**: Sault Ste. Marie used its investment to develop a legislative toolkit to educate tribal leadership and community members, inform tribal advocacy groups, and educate policy-makers about issues important to the Tribe. The toolkit includes a legislative database and accompanying how-to manual, a legislative consultation calendar, and fact sheets on tribal sovereignty and the history of the Tribe. Saulte Ste. Marie designed the toolkit as a template that NCAI and its member tribal nations could customize for their own purposes.

- **Yurok Tribe**: In December 2015, after months of committee drafting and opportunity for public comment, the Yurok Tribal Council voted to enact the Yurok Tribe Genetically Engineered Organism (“GEO”) Ordinance. The ordinance prohibits the propagation, raising, growing, spawning, incubating, or releasing of genetically engineered organisms (such as genetically engineered salmon) within the Tribe’s territory and declares the Yurok Reservation to be a GEO-free zone. While other tribes, such as the Navajo Nation, have declared GEO-free zones by resolution, this ordinance appears to be the first of its kind in the nation.
STRENGTHENING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY IN INDIAN COUNTRY

The PTG, which stewards the Native Financial Education Coalition (NFEC), deepened its partnerships with other national organizations committed to enhancing financial capability in Indian Country over the past year. It also presented on several webinars focused on protecting Native consumers and promoting asset building in Native communities.

Also, in May 2015, the PTG concluded the initial pilot of NAT$VE in the BANK, a joint initiative of NCAI and NFEC. Focused on Native youth and young adults ages 13 to 25, the initiative sought to empower them to get a head start on building their financial futures by encouraging them to develop a relationship with a financial institution. The challenge asked participants to complete four tasks: (1) an online course about building your financial future, (2) opening a savings or similar account with a financial institution, (3) taking a “selfie” with your “banker,” and (4) sharing your story about your financial goals and how you will achieve them. More than 500 Native youth participated in the initial pilot, and the PTG is integrating the pilot’s lessons into version 2.0 of NAT$VE in the BANK, which will launch in 2017.

The PTG also hosts the Tribal Exchange Stock Market Game. Launched in partnership with the Stock Market Game in 2008, the Exchange teaches valuable life skills and team building, while facilitating inter-tribal connections for American Indian and Alaska Native students. The program is funded through a grant from the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), which allows students attending BIE schools to participate in the program for free. Students are organized into teams, the teams are given $100,000 in game money to invest, and the team that increases the value of the investment most by the end of the 10-week program wins. More than 1,500 students have participated since the program’s inception.

ASSISTING NCAI’S DEFENSE OF THE INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT (ICWA)

NCAI has been working tirelessly with its organizational partners to protect ICWA and inform and then promote the long-awaited ICWA regulations, which were released in June 2016. The PTG supported this critical effort, conducting video recorded interviews with national ICWA advocates to help educate policy makers and the general public about the importance of the act and the need for the new regulations. These interviews – featuring National Indian Child Welfare Act (NICWA) Board President Gil Vigil, NICWA Executive Director Sarah Kastelic, and NCAI 1st Vice President Fawn Sharp – can be found on NCAI’s YouTube channel.

To learn more about the PTG’s work, please visit: http://www.ncai.org/ptg
NCAI was established to protect and strengthen tribal sovereignty, which includes promoting a public understanding of the rightful place of tribes among the American family of governments. We accomplish this through powerful initiatives to affirm the inherent rights and respect of tribal nations, including the Change the Mascot campaign, the Tribal Supreme Court Project, and Native Vote. NCAI also maintains varied and proactive communication on important activity concerning Indian Country.

**CHANGE THE MASCOT**

In 1968, NCAI initiated a campaign to end negative and harmful stereotypes of Native peoples in the media and popular culture. A primary focus of this campaign has centered on the use of “Indian” themed mascots, names, and logos, which have dehumanized and devalued the diverse heritages of Native peoples. This effort coincides with one of NCAI’s core missions which is to educate the general public about the true diversity of Native peoples and cultures. NCAI and the Oneida Indian Nation of New York have partnered on the Change the Mascot initiative to increase awareness and educate the general public about harmful, stereotypical “Native themed” mascots, names, and logos and the impact these stereotypes have on issues such as education of Native youth, child welfare, public safety, and healthcare.

The Change the Mascot campaign has seen great progress. This year the campaign has participated in a number of interviews and panels highlighting the need for removing the harmful images and names, launched a new radio ad with Native high school student asking to keep derogatory names and images out of the schools, coordinated a unified voice with a press conference and statements regarding ongoing tactics to minimize the Native voice, and spoken out about derogatory and disrespectful names used by politician’s in their campaign efforts and have asked for a respectful dialog. These efforts are making an impact which we can see by the additional support we have received including:

- Colorado calling for the removal of all damaging Native Mascots in public schools,
- Adidas announcement to assist any school that would like to change their harmful mascot,
- Support from political members of United Kingdom to keep the Washington football team name out of the UK in preparation for a game scheduled there this year,
- Additional letter of support from a US Members of Congress for changing the name,
- US Department of Labor’s Center for Civil Rights requesting that no Washington gear be worn to a staff event,
- And, additional statements and letters of support from the religious community to change the mascot.

Alongside our partners, NCAI will continue to advocate for the retirement of these derogatory names and mascots, while continuing education efforts about the true cultural heritage of Native peoples.
BANNER YEAR FOR TRIBAL SUPREME COURT PROJECT: COLLECTIVE EFFORT GOES THREE FOR THREE IN MAJOR CASES

The Tribal Supreme Court Project, staffed by NCAI and the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), was formed in 2001 to promote greater coordination and to improve strategy on litigation that may affect the rights of all tribes.

It was an extremely busy year for the Tribal Supreme Court Project in the 2015-16 term. Tribal leaders were concerned at the beginning of the year when the Court accepted review on three major Indian law cases. But tribes won all three cases on the scope of tribal jurisdiction, reservation diminishment, and the reliability of tribal court decisions. The Tribal Supreme Court Project produced well, building on years of cooperation among tribes and their allies. The Project also had a first this year, with NCAI and NARF participating in moot arguments for distinguished Supreme Court practitioners Paul Clement and Neal Katyal, both former Solicitors General.

It was also a significant year for the Court, as Justice Antonin Scalia died in February at age 79. His confirmation in 1986, combined with Justice Thomas’s in 1991, shifted the Supreme Court in a conservative direction. With an open seat to be filled, NCAI will continue to monitor the appointment selection as it is very important the selected Justice respect tribal sovereignty and treaties under the U.S. Constitution.

Justice Scalia’s absence affected the most highly watched case of the year. In Dollar General v. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, regarding tribal court jurisdiction over a non-Indian business, Justice Scalia’s comments at argument appeared unfavorable to tribes. But on June 23, 2016, an equally divided (4-4) Supreme Court affirmed the ruling of the Fifth Circuit which upheld tribal court jurisdiction over a non-Indian corporation doing business on the reservation. The Fifth Circuit decision is not direct precedent outside of Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas, but is persuasive for other courts and affirms the longstanding principle that tribal courts have civil jurisdiction over non-Indian conduct arising from consensual relations on Indian reservations.

The Project worked closely with the attorneys for the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to develop and coordinate a robust amicus brief strategy in support of tribal court jurisdiction resulting in eight amicus briefs in support: (1) Amicus Brief of the United States; (2) Amicus Brief of the State of Mississippi (joined by Colorado, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon and Washington); (3) Amicus Brief of NCAI
NCAI’s General Counsel John Dossett reports on the successful year of the Tribal Supreme Court Project at the 2016 Mid Year Conference.

This is an important victory for Indian country, and was the result of an effective coordinated strategy. The Project worked with the Solicitor General’s office and prepared three amicus briefs in support of the United States: (1) Amicus Brief of the National Congress of American Indians on discussing the reliability of tribal court decisions and deference to Congress; (2) Amicus Brief of the National Indigenous Women’s Resource Center focused on the severe problem of escalation of repeat domestic violence offenders; and (3) Amicus Brief of former U.S. Attorneys supporting the need for the habitual domestic violence statute as an important prosecutorial tool to protect Native women and children within Indian Country.

On March 22, 2016, the Court issued a unanimous (8-0) opinion in Nebraska v. Parker written by Justice Thomas which affirmed the decision of the Eighth Circuit that an 1882 Act of Congress did not diminish the Omaha Indian Reservation. Nebraska and the Village of Pender had challenged whether the establishments in Pender which serve alcoholic beverages are subject to the Omaha Tribe’s liquor licensing and tax regulations. The Court declined to depart from its long-standing test to evaluate whether a surplus land act diminished a federal Indian reservation and to adopt a test of de facto diminishment based on whether an area has lost its “Indian character.” The Court reiterated that only Congress can diminish the boundaries of an Indian reservation and that its intent to do so must be clear from the statutory text and history.

NCAI encourages tribes and their attorneys to contact the Tribal Supreme Court Project to coordinate resources, develop strategy and prepare briefs, especially at the time of the petition for a writ of certiorari, prior to the Supreme Court accepting a case for review.

Please contact us if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance:

John Dossett, NCAI General Counsel, (202) 255-7042 (jdossett@ncai.org), or Richard Guest, NARF Senior Staff Attorney, (202) 785-4166 (richardg@narf.org).
The Native Vote has the power to change the course of local, state and federal elections. 2016 is a presidential election year, and NCAI is working hard to get tribal citizens to the polls. We connect a network of 150 Native Vote coordinators across the nation, and provide toolkits of information and merchandise as voting start-up kits.

NCAI has conducted monthly webinars on Native voter mobilization topics including GOTV and voter protection. NCAI has partnered with other organizations to bring as many resources to tribal leaders and native vote coordinators. Some of the webinars and partnerships include: the National Indian Education Association for a Teach the Vote webinar; Intertribal Council of Arizona for a Building Your Get Out the Native Vote Plan webinar; Rock the Vote with Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla (CTUIR); as well as the CTUIR Youth Council on a webinar geared toward engaging Native Millennials.

NCAI engaged tribal leaders at the 72nd Annual Convention with a breakout session titled Native Vote: Let’s Talk About Organizing! featuring Native legislators, community leaders, and topics about running for office, and sharing tools and strategies.

In addition, University of Utah’s Political Science Professor Dan McCool delivered a presentation during the General Assembly that focused on the history of voting barriers in Native Communities and the importance of the Native vote. And to round out the Native Vote presence at the convention, one of the favorite events was the Native Vote Talent Show/Lip Sync Battle. Native youth, NCAI staff, Native celebrities, and other attendees energized participants with ways to engage community members around Native Vote.

A Native Vote pre-meeting was conducted in February 2016 at the Executive Council Winter Session in Washington, DC. It emphasized voter protection and ensuring that Indian Country citizens will be able to cast ballots at convenient locations without restrictive identification requirements, and free from intimidation.

At our 2016 Mid Year Conference, NCAI also utilized having a large audience to share more tools and create excitement around voter engagement. A training session on Voting Rights: How to Remove Barriers to Equal Access to the Polls, was conducted by voting rights experts. Participants received information about how to challenge restrictions on voter ID, how to engage in redistricting efforts, and how to ensure the rights of indigenous language speakers are upheld.

A General Assembly presentation on efforts to increase access to early voting and voter registration sites across Indian Country was provided by OJ Semans, Executive Director of Four Directions. Then a Native Vote training session on using Voter Activation Network (VAN) tools was given by WIN-WIN, a Washington state organization designed to strengthen grassroots engagement to build political power.

Native Vote can play an important role in the 2016 local, state and federal elections.
NCAI also participated in trainings and workshops hosted by other organizations and tribes. Some included a NCAI and the Inter Tribal Council of Arizona cosponsored two-day Get Out The Vote training session for regional tribal community organizers and tribal officials held at the Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community.

NCAI Wilma Mankiller Fellows gave a presentation to the Center of Native American Youth Advisory Committee titled “Get Involved with Native Vote.” A Native Vote presentation was also provided by NCAI to the General Assembly at the National Indian Council on Aging Annual Conference, sharing ideas to get out the vote as well as making sure those votes are protected.

Other Native Vote activities this year include a national 2016 Native Vote Action Week for September 26-30, with a focus on September 27, National Voter Registration Day. Distribution of materials of over 50 Native Vote starter kits of bumper stickers, t-shirts, and buttons to Native Vote Coordinators.

NCAI’s Native Vote sustained effort has drawn national attention. Several successful candidates have attributed election victories to the engagement of Native peoples’ participation.

NCAI and all of Indian Country can be exceedingly proud and thankful for the volunteer work of coordinators throughout Indian Country and tribal communities.

NCAI has a long history of protecting Indian voting rights, including litigation in Arizona and New Mexico in the 1940s that first ensured Native voting rights. More recently, NCAI has been involved with election monitoring efforts throughout Indian Country, and has participated in litigation on the acceptance of tribal identification documents and the placement of polling locations.

Over the past year, NCAI has worked with stakeholders from across Indian Country to continue to develop the Native American Voting Rights Coalition, which was launched in 2015 with the goal of ensuring that our work to protect and advance the voting rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives is coordinated and as effective as possible.

NCAI has led a working group focused on capacity building, which has worked to educate voters about their rights and equip tribal leaders to monitor and engage in local decisions about election administration that impact their tribal citizens. To this end, we have developed voter rights brochures for states with significant tribal populations and conducted trainings on engaging with local election administration officials.

NCAI’s Native Vote sustained effort has drawn national attention. Several successful candidates have attributed election victories to the engagement of Native peoples’ participation.

NCAI and all of Indian Country can be exceedingly proud and thankful for the volunteer work of coordinators throughout Indian Country and tribal communities.
OUTREACH

NCAI is committed to providing members with up to date information, and stakeholders with resources on tribal nations. From speaking engagements to written briefing papers, from visits to the classroom to testimony in Congress – NCAI is tireless in raising awareness of tribal concerns and interests.

Coordinating messages on priority topics is central to unifying the voice of our membership. NCAI has worked in partnership with tribes and national organizations to amplify the issues of Native child safety under the Indian Child Welfare Act; removing disrespectful Native American symbols and mascots from team names and school environments; research on improved tribal health; protecting our vital natural resources and sacred places; tribal-state government collaboration; and protecting tribal sovereignty in the U.S. Supreme Court, among others.

EMBASSY AND VISITS

The Embassy of Tribal Nations that houses the headquarters of NCAI in Washington, DC is a powerful symbol of the importance of tribal nations in the American family of governments, and a potent presence of our nation-to-nation relationship with the United States. It is an invaluable resource in fulfilling NCAI’s mission to educate the general public, policy makers, international visitor and others about tribal sovereignty.

NCAI has hosted formal visits in the past 12 months by more than 50 groups including nearly 600 people from schools, states across the country, countries around the world, and other tribal nations.

From in-depth policy briefings to general educational sessions to simple tours, visits to the Embassy of Tribal Nations reinforce the presence of tribal governments and our inherent rights as Native peoples. A learning session in March 2016 with an international group brought representatives from more than 19 countries in a single visit. More than 40 universities and schools have brought their students to learn about the ways that NCAI advocates for Indian Country.

The Embassy opened its doors in 2009, and from that first day has experienced a constant flow of visitors and information exchange. In 2016 NCAI launched a capital campaign to secure ownership of the property and retire the debt. Please consider a contribution to NCAI in support of this campaign. Go to our website www.ncai.org or call (202) 466-7767 for more information.
MEDIA AND PRESS

NCAI's **media engagement** is highly proactive and effectively promotes the importance of tribal sovereignty on behalf of its members, and all tribal nations. We educate the public, and just as importantly the media itself, on Native American affairs and priorities.


NCAI is a trusted resource for information on tribal nations and issues important to their citizens. Media tools include press releases, press conferences, statements, briefings, vivid photography, varied video, and audio clips to support news coverage of our activities. See the NCAI Publications on pages 52-53 in this report for a list of materials produced by NCAI to support our advocacy.

The State of Indian Nations address is NCAI’s largest media event of the year. The 2016 Address was viewed online by 3,887 people. More than 116,000 people were engaged through social media. Top news sources including the *New York Times* published articles on this important statement of tribal sovereignty. NCAI cultivates strong media relations as part of our strategic outreach and communications efforts.

Tribal leaders, partners, federal officials and members of the press at the 2016 State of Indian Nations Address, a major annual media event for NCAI.
SOCIAL MEDIA

NCAI’s websites and many social media platforms drive engagement, information, and awareness of our difference-making work. The explosive growth of interconnectedness through social media has been met by NCAI efforts to encourage conversations all around the world on tribal issues.

Our main website at www.ncai.org hosts an expansive array of resources on NCAI conferences, legal and legislative efforts, testimony, resolutions, speeches, tribal directory, publications and important regional and national events impacting our members. NCAI website pages include detail on critical work for Indian Country done by NCAI’s Policy Research Center, Native Vote, Partnership for Tribal Government, Tribal Supreme Court Project, and projects like tribal support of the benefits of the Violence Against Women Act.

In 2016, NCAI Facebook followers is nearing 60,000 and we put up 224 posts in that single year. From 2014 through 2016, the amount of Facebook page ‘Likes’ has grown by nearly 53% from 27,084 to 57,116. In August 2016, a single NCAI Facebook post on #StandingWithStandingRock was shared almost 4,000 times and reached nearly 150,000 people.

NCAI has 27,500 followers on Twitter, posts photos through Instagram and Flickr, posts videos to its YouTube channel and through Vimeo online, and maintains expanding listservs for targeted email broadcasts and action alerts.

Our social media outreach extends to 45 countries and our messages are translated into 40 languages.

Visit any of NCAI’s social media venues for important information regarding Indian Country and supporting our mission.
NCAI takes the lead in gaining tribal consensus on a constructive and promising vision for Indian Country. Our policy issues and initiatives are driven by the unified voice of our diverse membership.

To fulfill this mission, NCAI advocates steadily and communicates abundantly on tribal priorities. Together with the communications and media outreach described on the prior pages, NCAI’s publications create tremendous value and leverage for our members.

In just the past 12 months, NCAI has been a rich resource for Indian Country with the following materials.

Annual Publications:
- White House Tribal Nations Conference Tribal Leaders Briefing Book
- FY 2017 Indian Country Budget Request

Policy Research Center:
- Research Updates in Spring, Summer and Fall
- Data Drum: Quarterly newsletters featuring data initiatives and resources
- Human and Sex Trafficking: Trends and Responses across Indian Country
- Four one-pager data reports on youth system involvement in Alaska, Montana, New Mexico and Oklahoma
- NCAI Comments on the Proposed Revisions to the Protections of Human Subjects in Research
- Translating Science: Research and Communities Addressing Diabetes in American Indians and Alaska Native Populations
- Analysis of Cities and Towns inside Reservations
- NCAI’s Regional Data Profiles
- Resilience and Trauma Backgrounder
- Tribal Leaders Scholar Forum Proceedings

Legislative and Policy:
- Policy Updates in Spring, Summer and Fall
- Analysis of President’s FY 2017 Budget Request
- Executive Council Winter Session Briefing Packets
- Tribal Impact Days Briefing Packets

Partnership for Tribal Governance:
- Workforce Development “Innovation Spotlight”: Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (the first of five of workforce development case studies)

Legal:
- Dollar General vs. Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians amicus brief
- U.S. v. Bryant amicus brief
- Nebraska v. Parker amicus brief
- Menominee Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin v. U.S. amicus brief
- Pena-Rodriguez v. Colorado amicus brief in support of petition for certiorari
- Special Domestic Violence Criminal Jurisdiction Pilot Project Report
- ICWA Lexi Case Update
- Tribal Supreme Court Project Update Memorandum
Testimony:

2016

May 26 – NCAI Opposition to Sec. 842 of H.R. 4909, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017
May 18 – S. 2785 to protect Native children and promote public safety in Indian Country; and S. 2920, the Tribal Law and Order Reauthorization Act of 2016
May 18 – S. 246 The Alice Spotted Bear and Walter Soboleff Commission on Native Children
May 11 – Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Hearing on the GAO Report on Telecommunications
April 15 – FY 2017 Tribal Programs House Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Subcommittee
April 15 – FY 2017 Tribal Programs Senate Labor, Health & Human Services, and Education Subcommittee
April 15 – The Need for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation for the Isolated Community of King Cove, Alaska

April 11 – NCAI Opposition to H.R. 4884, the Controlling the Unchecked and Reckless Ballooning of Lifeline Act of 2016
March 15 – NCAI Opposition to S. 2039, and Support for Changing the Name of “Devil’s Tower” to the Bear Lodge National Monument
March 14 – NCAI Opposition to Senate Amendment 3447 to S. 2012, the Energy Policy Modernization Act of 2015
Feb 19 – NCAI Briefing to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights on A Quiet Crisis: Federal Funding and Unmet Needs in Indian Country 2016 Update
Feb 18 – Ensuring Intermodal USF Support for Rural America to the Senate Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation and the Internet
Feb 16 – Status of the Public Safety Broadband Network to the House Subcommittee on Communications & Technology

2015

December 12 – International Indigenous Peoples Forum on Climate Change Statement at Closing Plenary of UNFCCC COP21

Webinars

- IRS Reporting Requirements for Tribal Employers under the Affordable Care Act
- The Cadillac Tax on Employee Benefits: What Tribal Employers Need to Know
- Tribal Juvenile Justice: How a Model Code Can Inform Local Decision-Making
- Revisions to Part 83 Regulations on Federal Acknowledgement of Indian Tribes
- Updates to the Rights-of-Way Regulation on Indian Land, 25 CFR Part 169
- Data Profiles: Native Families
- Native Vote 2016 Webinar Series: Engaging Native Millennials
- Native Vote 2016 Webinar Series: “Building Your Get Out the Native Vote Plan”
- Update on Bureau of Indian Education Reorganization
- E rate Program Overview: Information on Eligibility of Tribal Schools and Libraries
- Lifeline Program Overview: Tribal Specific Reforms for Low Income Tribal Consumers
- The Tribal Tax and Investment Reform Act of 2016
- Advancing Trust Reform: New Law to Modernize Trust Asset Management
- The Indian Community Economic Enhancement Act of 2016
- Native Vote 2016 Webinar Series: Teach for the Native Vote
NCAI MEMBERSHIP

NCAI is a membership driven organization, and provides exceptional value to our members. Our membership is a strong representation of the many tribal nations, villages, communities, individuals, organizations and partners that constitute the whole of Indian Country.

NCAI provides a unified national voice to our members, and the organization engages in educational outreach, and legal, legislative and administrative activism on behalf of its membership. NCAI strives to ensure that all tribes and individuals are well-informed about all such issues affecting the welfare of Indian Country. Together we work to strengthen tribal sovereignty for the prosperity of tribal communities and nations.

NCAI membership is made up of tribes, individuals, and organizations who have met the eligibility criteria and paid dues as outlined in the Article III of the NCAI By-Laws. Members are determined to be in good standing upon full payment of dues and having fulfilled the requirements of the Credentials Committee.

The benefits of membership depend upon the category, but may also include: NCAI electronic Broadcasts and Alerts; NCAI materials; reduced conference rates; and votes in NCAI elections.

1. Tribal Membership
Any tribe, band or identifiable group of American Indians, Eskimos, and Aleuts shall be eligible for tribal membership provided it shall fulfill all of the requirements. Please visit the NCAI website page on Membership for the full terms of eligibility.

2. Indian Individual Membership
Any person of Indian and/or Alaska Native ancestry in the United States or a Native of Alaska is eligible for individual membership. For the purpose of membership, an Indian is a person recognized as a member by an Indian tribe, or combination of tribes and bands recognized by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Indian Claims Commission, Court of Claims, or a State.

3. Individual Associate Membership
Non-Indian applicants may be admitted to non-voting associate membership upon the payment of annual dues as fixed by the By-Laws.

4. Organization Associate Membership
Organizations may be admitted to non-voting associate membership upon the payment of annual dues as fixed by the By-Laws.

For further membership information, contact: The Embassy of Tribal Nations at [202]-466-7767 or visit the Membership page of the NCAI website at www.ncai.org.
Every day, NCAI is on the front lines of advocacy and education for tribal sovereignty. We are the collective voice of Indian Country, protecting and advancing the rights and recognition of tribal nations. NCAI has grown to become the leading Native American organization, serving a diverse network of tribal nations, tribal citizens, and Native organizations.

NCAI’s vital work is simply not possible without our members and supporters.

There are many ways you can contribute to the mission of NCAI to help build stronger tribal nations, and a stronger United States of America. Visit our website at www.ncai.org or call the Embassy of Tribal Nations at (202) 466-7767 to lend your support.

**Membership**

Become a member of NCAI and join the network of tribes, partners and stakeholders shaping the future of the next seven generations. NCAI is a wellspring of resources to build healthy tribal governments and communities, with some benefits only members enjoy. See NCAI Membership in this report for more information, and visit our website to become a member today.

**Sponsorship**

NCAI hosts major conferences and events throughout the year. Sponsoring these events brings recognition in front of the largest annual convention of tribal leaders in the nation. NCAI’s innovative conferences achieve consensus on important national Indian policy and flow information throughout our network.

Be a sponsor for NCAI’s forward thinking programs that promote nation-building and community empowerment. Your support goes beyond a single event, and allows NCAI to keep up our critical year-round advocacy and education efforts.

**Contributions**

NCAI is deeply grateful for contributions made to advance our mission, and uses many tools to make giving easier. Consider making a direct contribution through our website.

The AmazonSmile program lets customers shop on Amazon (smile.amazon.com) and the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to NCAI, when customers select us as the charitable organization of their choice.

Federal employees can give easily and directly to NCAI through the Combined Federal Campaign to CFC #10110.

**Focused Fundraising Campaigns**

NCAI can commit your contribution to programs and initiatives of your choice. From encouraging Native youth, supporting the Tribal Supreme Court Project, helping to #ChangeTheMascot, to promoting Native Vote, our many focused objectives need your support.

NCAI is launching a capital campaign to retire the $6 million debt on the Embassy of Tribal Nations building in Washington, DC. The Embassy benefits tribes and tribal organizations in many ways, enhancing the presence of sovereign tribal nations in the U.S. capital and increasing public policymaker awareness about tribal governments.

The 75th Anniversary of NCAI is coming in 2018, and NCAI has already begun raising funds to honor this milestone in fulfilling the vision of our founders. Since 1944, NCAI has answered the call to build on the rights our ancestors worked so hard to achieve.

**Estate Planning**

You can also extend your generosity and leave a meaningful legacy by building charitable giving to NCAI into your estate planning.

Indian Country owes you a debt of gratitude for the important role your support plays in the work of NCAI.
An investment in the National Congress of American Indians reaps exponential benefits. NCAI is on the forefront of national legislative, legal and Administrative advocacy for tribal priorities shaped by the consensus of its members. As a unified voice, NCAI makes a difference in and for Indian Country.

The success of NCAI’s work is built on the generosity and ingenuity of tribal leaders, tribal nations, foundations, businesses, Native citizens, and non-Native allies. We are deeply grateful for the investments of the following NCAI partners:

- Ak-Chin Indian Community
- AMERIND Risk
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Aqua Fund
- Bank of America
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bush Foundation
- Cheyenne Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma
- Coeur d’Alene Casino Resort
- Coeur d’Alene Tribe
- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of Colville Reservation
- Dentons
- Department of Defense
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Justice
- Equal Measure
- Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund
- Forest County Potawatomi Community
- Google Inc.
- Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe
- Kalispel Tribe
- KeyBank
- Muckleshoot Indian Tribe
- National Science Foundation
- NEO Philanthropy
- Northwest Area Foundation
- Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission
- Nuvodia
- Office of Hawaiian Affairs
- Pala Band of Mission Indians
- Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians
- Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
- Puyallup Tribe of Indians
- Redding Rancheria
- Robert Burnette
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Roche Diagnostics
- San Manuel Band of Mission Indians
- Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians
- Seventh Day Adventist Church (Native Ministries)
- Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community
- Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians
- Sonosky, Chambers, Sachese, Miller & Munson
- Spokane Tribe
- Squaxin Island Tribe
- Suquamish Indian Tribe
- Swinomish Indian Tribe
- Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation
- Walmart
- Walton Family Foundation
- Washington Indian Gaming Association
- W.K. Kellogg Foundation
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NCAI President Brian Cladoosby and members of the NCAI staff at the 2016 State of Indian Nations Address.
This annual report is printed on 30% post-consumer recycled paper. The design firm for the report is Native American owned. Agency MABU is a private company founded by Mike Mabin, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in North Dakota.