WE ARE STRONG
WE ARE RESURGENT

New Youth Commission
New Direction

Let’s Make Sure Indian Country Counts
Census 2020
We are Strong, We are Resurgent
Message from NCAI President Jefferson Keel

Dear Distinguished NCAI Members and Friends,

Since its founding in 1944, NCAI has acted as the unified voice of Indian Country, a powerful vehicle through which tribal nations could amplify their collective voice. As we journey through our 75th anniversary year, we look to build upon the mighty foundation of tribal advocacy, public education, and outreach set by our forebears.

Looking ahead, we have a fresh opportunity to honor the past and its traditions, and this official revival of the Sentinel does just that. The Sentinel is a publication NCAI began producing in its inaugural year as a means of communicating with our membership news about NCAI’s work and policy developments concerning Indian Country in Washington, D.C. Over time, and with more widespread access to technology, the Sentinel slowly transitioned into the digital NCAI Broadcast to deliver news and action alerts to your email inbox.

However, we know the value of producing material focused on policy and current events; but there is also a space for it to feel like a conversation around the dinner table or at a community event. We want to share the work NCAI is doing with and on behalf of Indian Country – and in a relatable way. We want the Sentinel to be a space that not only informs, but also sparks dialogue.

In this Spring 2019 edition, we give a glimpse into the upcoming Mid Year Conference & Marketplace in Reno, NV; we take a look at NCAI’s advocacy work and highlight the importance of advance appropriations; we discuss the re-

authorization of VAWA in an op-ed article penned by NCAI’s Recording Secretary, Juana Majel-Dixon – and much more.

With every season comes the possibility, and often the promise, of change. Come what may, Indian Country is resilient – always has been – and every day we transform challenges into opportunities. Our strength flows from our ancestral knowledge and in working together. Our resurgence stems from the challenges our tribal nations face, the innovative solutions we employ to help our citizens, and the grit and determination we express to ensure the wellbeing of our communities.

We hope the Sentinel will reclaim its place as a valuable source of information, a conversation starter, and an essential tool to help us as we embark upon shaping the future we want to create together.

Respectfully,

Jefferson Keel
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From its inception in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has fought on behalf of tribal nations on countless issues. From the struggles against the policies of the Termination Era to the battles to protect the Indian Child Welfare Act today, NCAI has relentlessly advocated for Indian Country for 75 years.

Addressing an audience at the Knight Studio inside of the Newseum in Washington, D.C., NCAI President Jefferson Keel eloquently laid out how Indian Country is addressing the challenges of today and embracing new opportunities, charting clear paths to brighter futures for all tribal nations.

“I stand here today to proudly proclaim to you, Congress, the Administration, and the world: The State of Indian Nations is strong,” President Keel exclaimed to start the State of Indian Nations Address, “and we grow stronger every day.”

The address was also broadcasted and streamed live across the United States and the world, ultimately reaching nearly five million people.

Keel, a decorated U.S. Army officer and Lieutenant Governor of the Chickasaw Nation, spoke of the continued resurgence of tribal peoples. From entertainment to education and sports to politics, Natives are making an indelible mark on mainstream society.

“The signs of our resurgence are everywhere,” Keel said.

Perhaps the collective voice of Native peoples was heard no louder than during the 2018 midterm elections, where the American Indian and Alaska Native vote was often the margin of victory in states like New Mexico, North Dakota, and Minnesota.

“Our resurgence is seen in the record number of Native candidates who ran for federal, state, and local office,” said Keel, “and won!”

“Those winners include Congresswomen Deb Haaland of New Mexico and Sharice Davids of Kansas, who along with new Minnesota Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan join Congressmen Cole and Mullin to expand the ranks of Native voices in the highest offices across the country like never before.”

While President Keel spoke optimistically of the outlook for Indian Country, he didn’t hold back in calling out the federal government for its lack of accountability to tribal nations on numerous fronts.

Calling the most recent shutdown, the longest in the nation’s history, a “pointless crisis,” Keel said the effects of the shutdown were felt disproportionately among Native people across the country.

“The shutdown cut particularly deep across Indian Country, disrupting access to vital services like healthcare, housing, and food distribution, and endangering public safety, from unplowed, snow-covered roads to unsupported children at high risk,” Keel said. “Yet like we’ve always done, tribal nations rose to meet a challenge not of their own making.”

Additionally, Keel stated NCAI’s opposition to the reorganization of the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Indian Affairs, and demanded that we meet head on the grave threat that is climate change.

The effects of climate change are being felt around the world but here at home in the United States, Indian Country is feeling the ramifications sooner and often worse than other populations. Keel cited stories of tribal nations from Alaska to Louisiana to Washington state that are having to relocate entire communities due to rising waters before they are lost for good.

“My hope for you is that no matter where you are or what is going on in your life, that you can create beauty as long as you always remember that every day is a good day to be Indigenous.”

- Representative Deb Haaland
“Climate change threatens our wellbeing, places, and ways of life,” Keel said, “in every conceivable way.”

Although the long-term outlook due to climate change seems dire, Keel struck a hopeful chord in speaking of the tribal nations that are leading the way on climate action. Ultimately, Keel said, it’s about leaving the world in a better place for generations to come.

“We are leading on climate action because we recognize future generations will either revere us for our bold initiative in this moment, or condemn us for the doomed planet we’ve left them,” Keel said.

As he neared the end of his address, President Keel mapped out the top objectives for Indian Country and what it means for the federal government to uphold their trust and treaty responsibilities.

From strengthening the Violence Against Women Act to protecting the Indian Child Welfare Act to ensuring a complete count of Native people in the 2020 Census and much more, Keel also called for policy makers to put partisan politics aside, noting that Indian Country’s issues are America’s issues.

“NCAI will be there every step of the way, partnering with you and holding you accountable, just as we have since 1944,” Keel promised the U.S. government.

Each year, following the State of Indian Nations Address, a member of Congress is invited to give a Congressional response and this year’s respondent was none other than one of the first two Native women elected to Congress, Deb Haaland.

Haaland, a Pueblo of Laguna member, spoke of the causes she is going to champion as a new member of Congress, including: drafting a comprehensive response to the “Broken Promises Report” issued by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, addressing the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women epidemic, and combatting the alarming suicide rate among Native youth, just to name a few.

Representative Haaland also called for more Native people, specifically women, to run for public office. She talked of the importance of representation and the need for Natives to tell their own stories.

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

Hitting the ground running upon getting to D.C., Haaland co-sponsored two pieces of legislation that would provide advance appropriations for basic services in Indian Country so that public safety services are available to Native people in the event of a future government shutdown.

Despite jumping in with both feet, Haaland admits it’s still early and there is much work to be done. Serving as the Vice Chair on the House Committee on Natural Resources, she promised to be an advocate for all tribal nations.

“I’m committed to protecting our sacred lands, addressing climate change, and moving renewable energy forward,” Haaland said, “so we can pass our natural treasures down to our children.”

In closing, Haaland shared a message of inspiration to the Native people in the audience and watching around the country.

“My hope for you is that no matter where you are or what is going on in your life, that you can create beauty as long as you always remember that every day is a good day to be Indigenous.”
Advocacy 101: Advance Appropriations

The Basics
Since 1944, NCAI has served as a strong, consistent, and representative voice in Washington, D.C. for tribal nations across Indian Country. With the unpredictable ebb and flow of politics and budgeting in Washington, it can sometimes be difficult to see how work in the nation’s capital directly translates into benefits for tribal communities. Ensuring the federal government upholds its treaty and trust obligations to tribal nations can have a direct impact, and advocacy is one of the strongest tools NCAI employs to make this happen. All of NCAI’s advocacy work is guided by our mission, unity and cooperation among tribal governments and people, for the security and protection of treaty and sovereign rights.

What We Do
With Congress, NCAI focuses its advocacy work on issues brought forward by NCAI’s membership and tribal leaders through our resolutions process (to learn more about how resolutions work, see the infographic on page 7). NCAI advocates for a multitude of priorities, such as protecting healthcare, restoring tribal homelands, trust modernization, preserving Native languages and cultures, and more. If it impacts Indian Country, NCAI is working on it. NCAI then promotes the passage of legislation that will have a sustained and significant impact on tribal communities and tribal citizens.

Once legislation is enacted, NCAI’s advocacy efforts turn to ensuring that laws are implemented as intended by Congress. NCAI has worked with tribal nations and the Administration to ensure that tribal nation are active participants in creating and implementing federal initiatives that will impact our communities.

In other areas, where tribal nations are leading through innovation and forward-looking solutions, NCAI shares those best practices with other tribes and federal officials. Examples include climate change assessment and adaptation; alternative judicial practices rooted in tribal cultures; healthcare focused on prevention and traditional practices; and natural resource protection.

Building relationships with federal agencies help to ensure tribal nations have a seat at the table in crafting regulations that affect tribal communities. Advocacy and partnerships within Congress can help to enable the passage of key legislation with tribal provisions. The legislation passed then allows tribal nations to exercise their sovereign rights to determine the future they want to create for themselves.

Advance Appropriations – Why It Matters
What Are Appropriations and Advance Appropriations?
Part of the federal government’s treaty and trust responsibility to tribal nations is to provide guaranteed health care and other basic services. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) delivers or funds services such as public safety, human services, child welfare, education, and more. The appropriations process is what determines funding for these services. Many tribal nations rely on the fulfillment of these treaty and trust promises for these basic governmental services.

Appropriations are decisions Congress makes annually about how much funding to make available for programs in the next fiscal year.

Advance appropriations are similar to regular appropriations, except that Congress decides how much funding to make available in the fiscal year after the next fiscal year. For example, the Indian Health Service (IHS) and BIA spending levels for FY 2021 would be set in the FY 2020 Interior appropriations bill.

Interior Appropriations Bill

How Would Advance Appropriations Affect Tribal Communities?
The recent 35-day partial government shutdown, which spanned from December 2018 to January 2019, provides a prime example of why advance appropriations is an important advocacy issue for tribal nations. The partial government shutdown destabilized Native health delivery and health care provider access. Tribes across the country were forced to cut services, ration care, and some closed altogether.

As part of the treaty and trust responsibility, the Bureau of Indian Affairs delivers or funds public safety, human services, child welfare, education, and other basic governmental services.
During the recent government shutdown, doctors, police officers, and other federal workers critical to the safety of human life had to work without pay. Some of these valuable professionals left their jobs due to the shutdown. Uncertainty compounds the problem of attracting and retaining professionals in health care, public safety, and justice systems in Indian Country.

Specific to IHS, in September 2018, the Government Accountability office issued a report finding that constant continuing resolutions (temporary funding measures) and government shutdowns place serious financial burdens on agencies and tribal nations and create difficulties in recruiting and retaining healthcare providers. The uncertainty of shutdowns and budget insecurity compounds the problem of attracting and retaining professionals in healthcare in Indian Country and also extends to affect other areas such as public safety and justice systems.

The Benefits of Advance Appropriations
Authorizing advance appropriations for IHS and BIA would protect programs serving Indian Country from future government shutdowns because Congress would have already set program funding levels for the fiscal year in question during the previous appropriations cycle. It would also eliminate uncertainty associated with short-term funding measures called continuing resolutions. Ultimately authorizing advance appropriations will ensure tribal governments and health administrators are able to continue delivering vital services, such as treating patients, responding to public safety emergencies, or policing tribal lands, without worrying if – or when – the necessary funding would be disrupted.

How You Can Make a Difference
Contact your senators and representatives to tell them to honor the treaty and trust responsibilities by supporting legislation that would authorize advance appropriations for IHS and BIA.

- The Indian Country Advance Appropriations Act
- The Indian Health Service Advance Appropriations

Since the inaugural convention in 1944, NCAI’s work has been governed by resolutions. Resolutions express the organization’s formal positions on issues affecting tribal, federal, state, and/or local legislation, litigation, and policy matters impacting tribal governments and communities. Resolutions are submitted by NCAI’s membership and passed by the body at NCAI’s conferences. Simply put, resolutions are the marching orders NCAI membership gives to the organization to carry out through its advocacy work.

View the resolutions flow chart below to see how the NCAI resolutions process works, or visit http://www.ncai.org/resources/resolutions-home to learn more.
Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum
NCAI Policy Research Center

Research and data can play a key role in advocacy efforts to support policy priorities of tribal nations, and can also help tribal nations identify local challenges and create innovative solutions to help strengthen their communities. NCAI’s Policy Research Center was established in 2003 to help tribal nations get the data and information needed to help advocate for policy priorities and to make strategic, forward-thinking decisions for their communities.

One such space is the NCAI Policy Research Center’s 14th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum, scheduled for June 26, 2019 during the NCAI Mid Year Conference & Marketplace. This one-day event is an interactive forum for tribal nations to engage with researchers about data and hear the latest research on topics relevant to their communities. Here’s what you can expect:

This year’s theme, Data and Research: Tribes Taking Action, will feature a General Assembly session in the morning, as well as breakout and poster sessions, where invited speakers will share their research, answer questions, and engage with tribal leaders and other attendees.

Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Director of NCAI Policy Research Center, encourages tribal leaders and their key staff to attend. “The data and research presented at the Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum can help tribal nations in their advocacy efforts and with strategic decision-making for their communities. The NIH consultation sessions on these timely topics are critical government-to-government interactions that can help tribal nations ensure research protects and benefits their communities.”

To learn more about the NCAI Policy Research Center and the 14th Annual Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum, please visit www.ncai.org/prc.

Tribal Leader/Scholar Forum Breakout Sessions

- **Genetic Research: Tribes Taking Action**
  This session will share what strategies tribes have developed to ensure that their communities are protected and also can benefit from cutting edge research.

- **Crime & Justice Data for Policy**
  Data is a key component in making informed decisions. This session will focus on data for tribal action.

- **Data for Community Change**
  This session will focus on examples of how data from community needs assessments can be used to take action to address priority issues in tribal communities.

- **Research Oversight**
  This session will provide tribal leaders with adaptable toolkits and learn from tribes that have implemented research oversight infrastructure in their communities.

- **Data for Climate Action**
  Climate Action data will be shared with tribal leaders to inform their decisions and take action.
The upcoming Census will be unlike any other census conducted before. The failure to fully enumerate the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population could result in devastating consequences, including reductions in access to federal and state services and resources.

The U.S. population is enumerated every 10 years and Census data is used to allocate Congressional seats and electoral votes, and is the basis for political redistricting. Under the 14th Amendment’s guarantee of equal representation, Congressional districts must have roughly equal numbers of people, so Census data is used to draw district lines. Public Law 94-171 governs the release of Census data for redistricting at the federal, state, and local levels, and an accurate count is necessary to ensure that American Indian and Alaska Native voters have an equal voice in the political process of elections. Jurisdictions also use Census data to comply with the Voting Rights Act, such as making sure Native voters have access to language assistance when they cast their votes in an election.

In addition to its use in fair voting representation, Census data plays a key role in the fair distribution of billions of dollars to tribes and Native people across the nation. Federal funding for tribal schools, Indian education programs, tribal health programs, Indian housing programs, water and sewage projects, roads, and economic development are distributed on the basis of data collected by the Census Bureau.

Why is the Census Important to Tribes?

- Full participation in American democratic process.
- Critical to forward thinking policy development.
- Data used for planning infrastructure, health care, and economic development.
- Honorable fulfillment of Indian treaties and federal obligations.

NCAI urges tribal nations to appoint tribal liaisons as part of the Census Bureau’s AI/AN program and to sign up for NCAI’s Indian Country Counts initiative to encourage tribal citizens to respond to the Census. Let’s make sure Indian Country Counts, for our people, our nations, and our future.

There will be a Census training for tribal leaders and attendees at the Mid Year Conference.


Women are an integral part of our tribal communities. Revered as life bringers, healers, knowledge bearers, and leaders; as mothers, sisters, aunts, and wives. While our roles vary from tribal nation to tribal nation, one element remains consistent: women are to be respected. That respect extends to ensuring our safety and wellbeing. Within sovereign nations, violence is not a tradition. We were raised to know our tribal women are sacred.

Six years ago, today, U.S. Congress reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) for the third time. The Act serves as a line of defense against the violence that pervades our communities. Each time VAWA has been reauthorized, it has included life-saving provisions for Native women. In 2013, I watched as Congress reaffirmed our inherent right as tribal nations to prosecute non-Indians who victimize our people on tribal lands. Since that time, tribal courts across the country have held non-Indian domestic violence offenders accountable in tribal courts and have brought justice and safety to many Native victims who had previously seen little of either.

But despite the ground-breaking reaffirmation of tribal jurisdiction in VAWA 2013, federal law continues to prevent tribal courts from prosecuting non-Indians who commit sexual violence crimes or who stalk or traffic Native women. Moreover, other members of our communities are also affected. Last year NCAI released a report on how the VAWA 2013 provision is working in tribal communities. That report found that tribes prosecuting non-Indians for domestic violence report that children are involved in their cases as victims or witnesses more than 60 percent of the time. But in these cases, federal law prevents tribal governments from prosecuting the crimes committed against Native children. Tribes are also unable to protect tribal police officers who may be assaulted when arresting a non-Indian for domestic violence. Too many of our sisters, sons, and daughters are suffering, and too many non-Native offenders continue to prey on our people with impunity. This must end.

As Congress is preparing to reauthorize VAWA for the fourth time, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) recently adopted resolution ECWS-19-005 urging Congress to pass a VAWA reauthorization bill that includes key protections for Native victims including: addressing jurisdictional gaps, improving the response to missing and murdered Indian women, and ensuring that all tribes are able to make use of VAWA’s important provisions. All of these priorities have bipartisan support – ending the scourge of violence in tribal communities is not a partisan issue.

As we move forward, I pray our spirits are renewed with the strength to keep advocating for the wellbeing of the next generation. It is time once again for Native women to stand tall and not have to constantly look over our shoulders. It is time for us to hold our heads up high and know the federal government is doing its part to support our sovereignty through VAWA to ensure the safety of our children and our people. Tribal nations are here, and we are ready for a positive change. The time is now for Congress to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act.
Indian Country Today
Fundraising and the Future

A Featured Article by Wilma Mankiller Fellow, Kolby KickingWoman

Long before he became Editor of Indian Country Today, Mark Trahant made a name for himself working for newspapers across the country.

“Oh, boy,” Trahant, a member of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, said when asked about some of the places he’s worked. “I started a tribal newspaper when I was a teenager and worked for my tribe for maybe three or four years.”

He then rattled off a litany of papers he’s spent some time at, including the Navajo Times, Salt Lake Tribune, Moscow-Pullman Daily News and Seattle Times just to name a few.

When NCAI asked him to be the Editor of Indian Country Today, Trahant viewed the job as a “truly great challenge” and couldn’t stand the thought of losing this outlet when there is a need for Native representation in the national mediasphere.

“I always thought that, if we didn’t have something that was national and a voice like this, we do need to invent something” Trahant said. “So when it [Indian Country Today] went dark and the prospect of it going gone, I just thought it was really chilling and something had to be done to get it back.”

Indian Country Today has since started a membership drive, with the goal of raising $100,000 or more. Beyond donations, he is also hoping tribal nations will get involved by either investing in the television show or underwriting it.

Underwriting are the ads at the end of shows that say, “so and so brings you this,” and Trahant thinks this opens up an avenue of opportunities for tribal nations to invest.

“When you think about things like casinos, where they don’t have a call to action, they can just talk about their location, it’s perfect for underwriting,” Trahant said.

Originally, Trahant had the idea of doing the TV show daily, but after talking to some partners it became clear that starting with a weekly show was the route to go. Trahant himself also has experience in the television realm, working with some partner organizations, they pulled off the first of its kind national Native election newscast this past November, “basically creating a CNN for Indians in one night,” he said.

“A weekly show starts off with a base of households in the millions and it allows us to change through journalism, people’s perceptions of American Indians and Alaska Natives,” Trahant added.

Bennett-Begaye, who also took part in the election night broadcast, says Indian Country Today is unique in the way it provides news coverage through an Indigenous lens.

“We’re striving hard to give people the news they need to make informed decisions and to also know how they can make a difference in their communities,” she said. “We are public servants who keep those in power accountable for the public.”

Trahant echoed those sentiments and added that he hopes readers expect and recognize the high standards he and the staff hold themselves to. Ultimately, he also hopes to tap into the talent pool of Indian Country by creating new opportunities for people.

“You think about what careers people can have and the storytelling of journalism is a great career and it’s one where we’ve largely been absent from the mainstream media, so now we’re creating our own,” Trahant said. “I mean one of the things Jourdan says that I think is cool, is ‘I get to come in and write stories about Indians all day.’” And that’s a great job.

As the media landscape continues to shift and grow, so must to Indian Country Today. Trahant has big plans as the digital platform continues to expand, eventually hoping to break into the television market and air a weekly TV show.

He also realizes what it will take to get there.

“I need money,” Trahant said with a laugh.

Trahant viewed the job as a “truly great challenge” and couldn’t stand the thought of losing this outlet when there is a need for Native representation in the national mediasphere.
Youth started gathering together during NCAI annual conventions as early as 1977. Formalized as a permanent fixture in 1997, the Youth Commission has played an active role within NCAI from acquiring knowledge and leadership skills from NCAI and tribal leaders, to acting as consultants giving the valuable tribal youth perspective on pressing issues in Indian Country. Today, the Youth Commission has newly elected officers and a new outlook on the future.

In October 2018 at NCAI’s 75th Annual Convention in Denver, CO, the Youth Commission, comprised of both returning and new members, decided it was time to make a bold statement. Faced with the ramifications of a district court case in Texas challenging the constitutionality of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), Native youth decided to speak up about an issue that impacts them and their families directly. During the week of conference, the Youth Commission decided to write a strong statement and film a video in support of ICWA. This declaration sparked a new vision for the Youth Commission and helped develop the framework for the year ahead.

Rory Wheeler, Co-President of the Youth Commission, said he is excited about this new era and helping to elevate youth voices into action and dialogue. “We are a working body of NCAI and it was great to see this evolution showing that our voice matters and that we are here to serve. Being at the table on the dais with the rest of the tribal leaders at Executive Council Winter Session gave us a sense of empowerment, that our voices will be respected, honored, and listened to.”

The Youth Commission is now hard at work preparing a robust youth agenda for the upcoming Mid Year Conference. With the support of NCAI Executive Board and NCAI staff, it looks to enact a plan of action to help fulfill their role in shaping their tribal nations.

“We’re here to serve—to really be an asset to tribal leaders, to the Executive Board, to NCAI in general,” Wheeler said. “We want to ensure that we’re practicing healthy leadership and learning best practices that will really pave the way to leaving a legacy for those that will come after us and honor those that came before us.”

For more information about the NCAI Youth Commission, please visit http://www.ncai.org/native-youth/ncai-youth-commission.
SAVE THE DATE
NCAI MID YEAR
Conference & Marketplace
SPARKS, NV JUNE 24-27, 2019
NUGGET CASINO RESORT

UPCOMING DATES
• TRIBAL UNITY IMPACT DAYS - Sept 10-11, 2019
• ANNUAL CONVENTION & MARKETPLACE - Oct 20-25, 2019
• EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WINTER SESSION - Feb 10-13, 2020
• MID YEAR CONFERENCE & MARKETPLACE - Jun 7-11, 2020