

that trappers and hunters sold, like bear fur, for money.

Let me be very clear: The single-most offensive name that you can call an American Indian is “Redskin.”

Today, a majority of people agree. In a recent national survey, 83 percent of Americans said they wouldn’t use the R-word to a Native American’s face. And they’re right.

We know the team owner stands on the wrong side of history. He has dug in his heels and refuses to change. But why do you do it, Fed Ex? You point with pride to your policy of diversity and inclusiveness. Yet, your name is on the stadium. How do you defend perpetuating exactly the kind of racism that 40 percent of your workforce has faced in one form or another?

And why do you do it, Coca-Cola? For generations, you have been the company that taught the world to sing. Why do you defend a name that teaches the young generation to hate?

And why do you do it Verizon – or Best Buy – or HP – or United Airlines? Many of us associate your companies with great American success stories! But doesn’t your defense of this name harken back to the worst of America’s failures?

American Indians are appropriately honored as soldiers and teachers, students and first responders, CEOs and community leaders. There is no honor in the name of that team.

It’s long past time that Washingtonians begin to see their fellow Native citizens through the eyes of respect and not as mascots for a football business that doesn’t even have a fraction of the resilience, pride or strength of character of any Tribal nation.

To those who say there are other issues that Indian Country should focus on, my response is simple: This issue is no different than any issue we work on every day at the National Congress of American Indians.

As we have since 1944, we will stand for the rights of Native peoples in every corner of our society, whether it’s under the bright lights of the NFL or in the voting booths of South Dakota.

This isn’t a partisan issue. This isn’t an issue of political correctness. We’re not trying to make news or make noise. We’re trying to make progress.

We’re standing up, with partners like the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the NAACP, the National Council of La Raza and the Fritz Pollard Alliance. We’re standing with Tribes and Native organizations, religious leaders and journalists, school students and former NFL stars and we’re calling on all fair-minded Americans to stand with us.

It is time to modernize our trust relationship

To sustain our progress, and build on it, we must rid ourselves of the old ways of thinking about our relationship.

We must modernize our trust relationship. The next step in strengthening that relationship is for the federal government to trust Tribes to determine their own future.

This is about more than Tribes having a seat at the table where decisions are made. This is about having policies

and processes that treat Tribal nations as partners in governing.

While we have a unique relationship with the federal government that will never end, it is time that our relationship reflects the true meaning of the word “trust.”

The federal government needs to recognize Tribal governments as true partners in supporting the citizens of our nations. It needs to update its laws and regulations to reflect that partnership – one based on deference and support, not paternalism and control.

Whether policy related to the Keystone Pipeline or renewable energy, health care or education, privacy rights or immigration, too often policymakers fail to surround themselves with people who understand Tribal perspectives or seek input from Tribal leaders and citizens.

We don’t want the federal government to solve our problems or dictate our future. We want to solve our own problems. We want to build our own future. We strongly believe that the greatest source of solutions that work for Indian Country is Indian Country itself.

In fact, we are already charting this future. The Native vote is influencing important elections, electing Republicans, Democrats and Independents who stand with Indian Country and uphold the trust responsibility.

A growing number of Native people hold elective office. I’d like to take a moment to congratulate my good friend, an Alaska Native and a former NCAI board member: Alaska’s new Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott.

Byron not only embodies his Tlingit culture – but also the idea that Native issues aren’t partisan issues.

The power of the Native vote shows that when we base our work on the principle that our voice can and must be heard, we can work together to tear down the barriers to growth for Tribal economies. We can give the next generation a better chance to work hard – and see that work pay off.

To that end, I see three important ways we can modernize the trust relationship – simplifying and streamlining government regulations, improving education and focusing the talents of Tribal nations to create economic growth.

Let’s simplify and streamline government regulations

Let me start where Ronald Reagan started – with simplifying government.

Part of our frustration today is similar to the frustration felt by state governments forced to live under regulations that were written for another age and time.

I often speak about how my Tribe lost a major contract with a large retailer. It happened because the federal government sat on our application for nearly two years, until the economy crashed and the retailer pulled out of the deal.

Many Tribal leaders have a similar story. The fact is that the federal agencies that oversee Indian Country are not equipped to deal with all of the decisions necessary to build an economy in the 21st century.

Congress and the administration need to find ways to help bring federal agencies out of the 19th century and into the 21st

century. We need them to be partners for growth and not barriers to growth.

Take access to capital. The ability to issue tax-exempt bonds to fund construction projects is the bread and butter of every modern state and local government. Yet this economic development tool is not available to Tribes. The IRS only allows Tribes to use tax-exempt bonds to fund “essential government functions,” like sewer systems.

It is time for the federal government to update its tax code to reflect its recognition of the equal status of Tribal governments.

The same goes for adoption. State courts say that a parent who adopts a child with special needs is eligible to receive a tax credit to help with care. Yet if a parent lives on a reservation and adopts a child with special needs, they don’t get a tax credit.

It’s not an oversight – it’s bad policy. It’s outrageous and discriminatory, and it needs to change.

Or take law enforcement. Despite an act of Congress, the FBI continues to effectively deny Tribal police access to the same National Crime Information Center database that they make available to state, local and even some campus police.

What does that mean? It means that if a protection order is issued in a domestic violence case, the Tribal court often cannot enter that order into the federal database. It means that protection might not follow the survivor off the reservation. It needs to change.

The same goes for the census of governments. Every five years, 70,000 government entities are surveyed, right down to local sewer districts.

But Tribal governments have never been included in this process. So when we appeal for federal resources, we do so without any of the data that every other government uses to receive funding.

And take an especially close look at technology. The rural broadband development project regularly reviews technology access in rural America.

Yet the last technology census of Tribal nations took place before Google, Twitter or smart phones even existed. The best data we do have indicates an ongoing digital divide. While 73 percent of Americans have access to broadband, in Indian Country it’s only 10 percent.

In spite of these barriers, Tribes are maintaining their place as the first American innovators. Just last week, President Obama highlighted a public-private partnership that brought high speed Internet access to the Choctaw Nation.

In a community where access was once nonexistent, today the Tribal Council has a new tool to engage citizens. The Choctaw School of Language is offering distance education courses. And the Broken Bow School District serves over 1,000 students using smart boards, iPads, online lesson plans and tools that increase parent engagement.

We need a comprehensive and updated study of our technology needs to advance more common sense initiatives like this one to increase our participation in the digital age.

Of course, there are more legislative and administrative solutions within reach than I can discuss here. But I want to focus

on two important areas where bipartisan solutions exist – education and economic growth.

Let’s improve education

No resource is more important to the continued success and growth of Tribal nations and the United States than our children. Education is a treaty right.

The greatest way to invest in this precious natural resource is to provide a high quality, culturally appropriate education. One that benefits all Native children and gives Native students the same chance to succeed as their non-Native peers.

For Indian Country, it all goes back to trust, flexibility and local solutions.

Focusing on Tribal control of schools promises to improve outcomes for our students. And creating greater accountability for public schools on reservation lands will ensure that Native students receive the quality education that they need.

We call on Congress to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act this year. We call for the inclusion of Tribal provisions to encourage Tribal-state partnerships, strengthen local control of education and begin to help every school deliver a high quality education.

We also call on Congress to enact legislation that supports Native language programs so education for our children is rooted in our history and culture.

Together, we should also take a hard look at the Bureau of Indian Education schools. Congress and the administration can do more to make sure the Native youth that attend these schools have high quality teachers, modern technology and the facilities to deliver excellent education.

Along the way, we must continue to seek innovative solutions. That is why I applaud the president’s proposal to make the first two years of Tribal and community college free. It will finally make K-through-14 education in America a reality.

I look forward to working with Congress and the administration to make this and other necessary investments in our youth, Native and non-Native.

After all, the relatively few dollars we spend on education today will save many dollars in the generations to come. Education destroys poverty and drug and alcohol abuse.

Let’s create economic growth

Likewise, when it comes to economic growth, what’s good for First Americans is good for all Americans.

But what can we do to power economic growth within Tribes – growth that has ripple effects far beyond their borders?

The answer centers around what Tribal governments have proven we can do when Indian Country has the flexibility to pursue ideas developed at the local level.

When it comes to infrastructure, Tribes need safe and well-maintained transportation options and housing – just like the rest of the country. And Tribes need better information highways too – just to catch up with the rest of the country.

I urge Congress and the administration to accelerate work that is under way

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