

Native and immigrant leaders forge new alliances to support each other

WASHINGTON – The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and Define American (DA) hosted their first event together, FIRST AMERICANS and NEW AMERICANS: Forging Shared Narratives Around Culture, Identity and Citizenship, on Sept. 14-15 at the John F. Kennedy Center for Performing Arts in Washington.

The two-day, forward-looking convening of nationally recognized Native nation and immigrant leaders gave participants the opportunity to come together and engage in a historic national conversation about what it means to be an “American” and how First Americans and New Americans can reshape the “American” identity to include the vibrant histories and present contributions of these communities.

The following commitments – among many others – were made at the convening:

Education about First Americans and New Americans

- At the root of the destructive laws and policies that negatively impact Native and immigrant communities is a profound ignorance about – or misunderstanding of – these communities by society at large, a byproduct of educational systems that inaccurately teach (or fail to teach at all) about the rich histories of our communities and the invaluable contributions they have long made to American life. In this vein, our communities will work together to develop and implement stronger curricula that fairly and fully conveys the truth about these communities.
- There’s a shared concern over preserving our respective languages,

histories, stories and songs as the wellspring of our cultural identities. NCAI and DA will work collaboratively to protect, advance and raise up these foundational components of our cultural identities through close consultation with the communities we represent and serve.

The Farm Bill

- The majority of Americans could not be fed without the contributions of First Americans and New Americans to this country’s food systems. NCAI, DA and their allies will work closely to ensure that the Farm Bill currently before Congress adequately addresses the concerns and priorities of Native nations and the immigrant community.

The Border Wall

- We will form stronger alliances aimed at ensuring that the shared concerns of Native nations and the immigrant community are addressed in the federal government’s decision-making process regarding whether and how to build a physical wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, and that construction of said wall does not take place without the consent of affected Native nations.

“This convening marked the start of an historic conversation – one meant not only to build alliances between communities, but to fundamentally change the way we talk about immigration in the United States. Purposefully held at the Kennedy Center in acknowledgement of JFK’s role in shaping history for our communities,

this frank conversation was grounded in the painful parts of history, which are often ignored, un-discussed or glossed over. When we talk about immigration, the two communities often left out of the conversation are Native Americans and immigrants themselves. This convening set out to change that,” stated Jose Antonio Vargas, Define American founder and CEO. “Through the power of shared stories, we challenged each other and the media to be more inclusive of both Native American and immigrant experiences across a wide spectrum of topics, including identity and race, economic and environmental justice, food systems and food sovereignty, and citizenship and human rights. Coming out of this first-of-its-kind convening between First Americans and New Americans, we are united in our willingness to continue to build relationships and have made important commitments to one another as leaders around shared issues of common concern. Now the real work begins.”

“FIRST AMERICANS and NEW AMERICANS was about a beginning – a collective beginning. A beginning focused on finding common ground and using it as a springboard to develop shared solutions to our shared challenges,” said Brian Cladoosby, NCAI president. “A beginning that seeks to jointly forge and advance new narratives that replace the false narratives that drive the destructive laws and policies that harm our communities and hold us back. A beginning that understands that we amplify our voice and our power when we work together, when we speak and act as one about what we collectively care about.”

DA and NCAI encourage Native nation leaders, immigrant leaders, allied organizations and the media to join this emerging conversation between Indian Country and the immigrant community as they work to develop and implement shared solutions that create more vibrant futures for First Americans and New Americans.

Contact NCAIpress@ncai.org or Noelle@defineamerican.com with any questions.

About NCAI

Founded in 1944, the National Congress of American Indians is the oldest, largest and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization in the country.

NCAI advocates on behalf of Tribal governments and communities, promoting strong Tribal-federal government-to-government policies and promoting a better understanding among the general public regarding American Indian and Alaska Native governments, people and rights.

For more information, visit ncai.org.

About Define American

Define American is a nonprofit media and culture organization that creates original content, curates stories and events, and challenges media in order to shift the cultural conversation about immigrants, identity and citizenship in a changing America.

Co-founded by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Jose Antonio Vargas, Define American is dedicated to increasing the visibility of undocumented immigrants and their contributions to America.

Visit defineamerican.com to learn more.

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TIME: 5-7PM
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Come join us as relatives, community, and family for an opportunity to hear about OHSU collaborations with Native communities -- past, present, and future.

For more information, contact Michelle Singer: 503.418.2199 or singerm@ohsu.edu

