

... from the State of Florida honoring Joy Prescott, a Seminole immersion school teacher, as teacher of the year ...

... to Little League International's decision to ban race-based mascots from all sanctioned competition ...

Our resilience is seen in Tribal nations' building of robust economies, which provide jobs and family economic security to hundreds of thousands of Native people and tens of thousands of non-Native people. Indian Country has a long way to go, but in more and more places, we are becoming primary drivers of economic growth, fostering a better quality of life for all.

Our unity is seen in our growing alliances, powerfully displayed in recent legal briefs defending the Indian Child Welfare Act. They saw 325 Tribal nations, 57 Native organizations, 31 child welfare organizations, 21 states, several members of Congress and other partners join forces to keep Native children immersed in their Tribal families, cultures, languages and communities.

Our strength is heard in the enduring power of our songs – prayers of tolerance and humility, sung with a good mind and enlightening purpose in the face of ignorance and arrogance.

It is seen in the mid-term elections. In North Dakota, New Mexico, Minnesota and elsewhere, Native people, understanding the stakes, turned out to the polls like never before – despite determined efforts to keep us away. In many places, we were the margin of victory, showing we are a political force to be reckoned with.

And our resurgence is seen in the record number of Native candidates who ran for federal, state and local office – and won!

On election night, I rose to applaud Peggy Flanagan, who as Minnesota's new lieutenant governor, becomes the highest-ranking Native woman elected to executive office in the United States!

Like many of you, my spirit was stirred by Ruth Buffalo, who took the oath of office in North Dakota in her traditional regalia, honoring her ancestors. Ruth's victory was pure, poetic justice, as she upset the state legislator who sponsored the bill to suppress Native voters by making them show IDs with residential street addresses.

And in our nation's capital, I was deeply moved by the first two Native Congresswomen in U.S. history – Deb Haaland and Sharice Davids – at their swearing in, embracing in a moment of solemn reflection about their historic achievement and all who sacrificed to make it possible. They join Tom Cole and Markwayne Mullin to give Indian Country its largest Congressional delegation ever.

Casual observers of Indian Country's resurgence may deem it an overnight phenomenon.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

Our success flows from the foresight and counsel of our ancestors.

It is driven by the core values and relentless spirit that have sustained our societies and cultures for millennia.

It grows today thanks to decades of planning, preparation and hard work of so many Tribal leaders, elders, advocates, youth, everyday Tribal citizens, Native Vote coordinators and our ever-expanding network of partners and allies.

Long before Wes Studi and Lyle Thompson came along, there was Chickasaw storyteller Te Ata, Osage ballerina Maria Tallchief, and Santee Dakota philosopher John Trudell, who showed the world that only Native people can truly define their own humanity and speak their own truths.

And before Deb Haaland and Sharice Davids rose to this moment, there was ...

... Elizabeth Peratovich, a well-known Tlingit civil rights leader,

... Ada Deer, a Menominee who served as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs and ran for Congress ...

... and Denise Juneau from Fort Berthold, who became the first Native woman elected to statewide office in Montana.

These leaders and many others cleared paths for Deb and Sharice to follow.

The truth is we've always been strategic planners and shrewd actors who adapt to and overcome the great challenges before us.

Today, as the first, distinct, Indigenous peoples of this land, we perpetuate our time-honored tradition of applying lessons learned from a closely held past to confront threats to our continued resurgence, ensuring our enduring vibrancy.

Indian Country owes our resurgence to Tribal sovereignty and self-determination – the inherent authority, strength and wisdom to ably tackle the great challenges of our time, just like our ancestors did before us.

Tribal leaders gathered 75 years ago to create the National Congress of American Indians to respond to the greatest threat of their time: the federal policy of terminating Tribal governments.

Through tireless struggle, Indian Country overcame that threat and in the decades since, NCAI has spearheaded Tribal nations' efforts to fend off the gravest threats to our right and ability to govern our lands, citizens, affairs and relationships as we see fit, from safeguarding the civil rights of Native people to protecting where and how we practice our spirituality.

NCAI continues to answer that call, for the threats we face today are just as daunting.

Take the recent government shutdown, this nation's longest ever.

This pointless crisis wreaked financial havoc on millions of Americans, including a disproportionate number of Native people.

It represented a gross dereliction of duty by our leaders in Washington, who are sworn to uphold the federal government's legally mandated trust and treaty obligations to Tribal nations by providing adequate, stable funding for programs that serve our people.

The shutdown cut particularly deep across Indian Country, disrupting access to vital services like health care, housing and food distribution, and endangering public safety, from unplowed, snow-covered roads to unsupported children at high risk.

It also meant opportunities lost. The Quinault Indian Nation, for example, lost a \$1.4 million timber sale during the shutdown, just because it couldn't get a signature from the feds.

Yet like we've always done, Tribal nations rose to meet a challenge not of their own making.

Many found creative ways to stretch their limited financial reserves to ensure employees supported by federal dollars could keep receiving a paycheck.

Others deployed innovative measures to help their citizens and other local residents make ends meet. The Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma, for example, kicked in its own money and established a GoFundMe page to provide groceries to those furloughed or working without pay.

The Mescalero Apache Tribe in New Mexico, meanwhile, offered affected workers jobs at its businesses.

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribes in Idaho culled from its bison herd to provide meat to workers unable to buy food for their families.

And the Navajo Nation's utility authority allowed furloughed employees to delay paying their bills until after the shutdown's end.

Tribal nations took these steps because as responsible governments, we take care of our communities, no matter what. We certainly don't manufacture crises to avoid doing so.

And with it likely to take months, perhaps years, for us to fully recover from this shutdown, Indian Country cannot afford – and America should not stand for – another one.

And no leader of the federal government should stand for it either. Each took an oath to protect the U.S. Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic. That solemn oath is to this country – not a party or an individual. If there's another shutdown, it should include the salaries and health care of everyone in Congress and the White House.

Indian Country faces another daunting threat in the administration's effort to undercut the regulatory framework by which Tribal nations place land into trust.

The Department of the Interior cannot be allowed to simply "make it up as it goes along" when deciding whether to take land into trust for Tribal nations, ignoring decades of established precedents in the process.

The department's recent "about-face" in rejecting the Mashpee Wampanoag's placement of traditional homelands into trust is especially troubling. If left to stand, it threatens to create a class system of "haves" and "have nots" among Tribal nations.

Some Tribal nations will be able to take newly acquired land into trust to protect sacred places; others will not.

Some will be able to regrow their land bases to empower economic growth; others will not.

They will be subject to the whim and conflicted interests of whoever is running Interior at the moment.

This not only ignores the Indian Reorganization Act's mandate of Tribal self-determination, it is patently and arbitrarily unfair.

We demand Interior rescind its Mashpee decision and recommit to its earlier precedent regarding land-into-trust applications under the 2014 Carcieri "M" Opinion.

We also call on the DOI solicitor to reinstate the Alaska "M" Opinion, which affirms the secretary's authority to place land in trust to benefit Tribal governments in Alaska.

The federal government's policy for Tribal lands needs to put the interests of Tribal nations first – and no one else's.

Equally concerning to Indian Country is the rushed and ill-conceived reorganization of the Department of the Interior and Bureau of Indian Affairs, done largely without Tribal input and against our declared wishes.

This effort has featured alarming changes made with no consultation or explanation.

For example, the abrupt "Thursday Night Massacre" saw vital high-level administrators across the BIA reassigned to distant places to work on issues or with Tribal communities they had little experience with. This left several regions without a permanent regional director for months on end, handicapping the bureau's ability to serve Tribal nations on the government's behalf.

This reorganization threatens to diminish the authority of BIA regional directors within Interior's overall structure and seeks to isolate the BIA from other agencies at Interior. This will, in turn, isolate and weaken the programs and services that those agencies provide Indian Country.

NCAI reiterates our call to the administration to halt the Interior and BIA reorganizations so it can assess their negative impacts on Tribal communities and then integrate Tribal priorities into a revamped restructuring plan.

We also demand Interior heed the call of Indian Country and Congress by creating an Under Secretary for Indian Affairs, so that our priorities can get their just due.

Another grave threat impacting not just Indian Country but the entire planet is CLIMATE CHANGE.

The science is settled. The evidence? Undeniable. Our world is gravely ill, human beings are the cause and only we can administer the cure.

Climate change threatens our well-being, places and ways of life in every conceivable way.

And by all accounts, Indian Country is feeling the wrath sooner and worse than other populations. From Shishmaref in Alaska to Isle de Jean Charles in Louisiana to Taholah Village in Washington, hundreds of Tribal communities are losing homes