



# ECWS<sup>24</sup>

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL WINTER SESSION

FEBRUARY 12 - 15, 2024

## WRAP UP REPORT





## SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11

On Sunday, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) set the stage for a significant week ahead with the NCAI Fund Board and NCAI Executive Committee Meetings. Leadership and representatives from the organization's twelve regions convened to establish the priorities for the coming year, laying down a roadmap for the advocacy and initiatives that would shape the future of Indian Country.

## MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12

### State of Indian Nations Address

The following day, NCAI marked a historic moment with the 2024 State of Indian Nations Address at the Warner Theater, a venue chosen for its rich historical backdrop, signifying a fresh chapter for this annual keynote event. After an honor song delivered by Lance Fisher (Northern Cheyenne) and Giovanna Ross (Oglala Lakota and Northern Peruvian), NCAI Executive

Director Larry Wright, Jr. (Ponca Tribe of Nebraska) provided a warm welcome to the tribal leaders, allies, and partners present, emphasizing the shared vision for prosperity that binds Indian Country together. Wright's opening remarks underscored the role of unity as the cornerstone of progress and self-determination for tribal communities, reaffirming NCAI's commitment to fostering collaboration and solidarity among Tribal Nations.

With the room's attention, NCAI's 24th President, Mark Macarro (Pechanga Band of Indians) delivered his first State of Indian Nations Address. President Macarro's inaugural speech connected his personal history with the broader narrative of the unity, strength, and progress that has defined Indian Country for generations.

In his reflection on the centennial milestones of both the Warner Theater and voting rights for Native people, President Macarro highlighted the significant advancements in Native representation across various sectors. However, he pointed out the ongoing challenges,

particularly in the realms of voting rights and tribal sovereignty, advocating for the Native American Voting Rights Act as a crucial tool for enhancing the political engagement of tribal citizens.

President Macarro underscored the importance of storytelling in preserving the histories and lessons from the past. He advocated for a unified approach to overcome the current challenges and build on the victories, drawing inspiration from the foundational principles of NCAI. In addressing the recent legal threats to Tribal Nations' sovereignty, Macarro also stressed the need for a deeper integration of Federal Indian law into legal education. He announced key initiatives aimed at protecting the future of Indian Country: hosting a National Public Safety and Justice Summit, forming a task force on tribal membership integrity, and convening a Native Vote roundtable to ensure the amplification of the tribal voice in the electoral

process.

Following President Macarro's address, U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola (Yup'ik), the first Alaska Native elected to Congress, provided a congressional response. In her recorded remarks, Peltola's message highlighted the critical juncture at which Tribal Nations stand, with recent victories fueling the momentum for further advocacy and engagement. She called for continued unity and collaboration to address the substantial challenges that lie ahead, underscoring the necessity of working together to secure justice, sovereignty, and a prosperous future for tribal communities.

To close out the program, NCAI Youth Commission Co-Presidents Caleb Dash (Salt River Pima Maricopa Indian Community) and Yanenowi Logan (Seneca Nation) took the stage to articulate their insights and perspectives, representing the voices of youth across Indian Country.



**Watch the 2024 State of Indian Nations Address**



## Task Force Sessions and Legislative Briefing

Monday's pre-conference agenda featured numerous task force sessions including those for Climate Action, Federal Recognition, and Transportation. The NCAI Climate Task Force met to discuss the longstanding impacts of climate change on tribal land, particularly in Alaska. They also discussed the Rights of Nature movement, which advocates for legal recognition of "Nature's inherent rights to exist, persist, and thrive." The Federal Recognition Task Force met to address the interests of all Tribal Nations, both federally and non-federally recognized, regarding changes to the tribal acknowledgment process. The NCAI-ITA Joint Transportation Task Force works on building

a unified advocacy approach to tribal transportation development and legislative reauthorization to promote safety and prosperity in tribal communities and to ensure the United States upholds its government-to-government relationship with Tribal Nations.

Additionally, the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition held a legislative briefing surrounding the Truth and Healing Commission Bill, S.1723, which aims to establish a U.S. Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act. During the briefing, attendees discussed the impact of assimilation policies and boarding schools at large and within their communities.

## VAWA Task Force 20th Anniversary Reception

The National Indigenous Women's Resource Center (NIWRC) and NCAI celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Restoration of Native Sovereignty and Safety for Native Women Magazine with a reception honoring past and present leaders of the NCAI Violence Against Women (VAWA) Task Force. Restoration Magazine was launched 20 years ago during efforts to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act and has since become an essential tool in advocating for tribal sovereignty and Native women's safety. The NCAI VAWA Task Force, established in 2003, has played a crucial role in supporting Tribal Nations in efforts to end violence against Native women, with significant strides made over the years in federal laws and policies for the safety and sovereignty of Native communities.



**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13**

## First Plenary Session

The official start of the 2024 Executive Council Winter Session was through the First Plenary Session on Tuesday, February 13. Lance Fischer and Giovana Gross provided an honor song and were followed by Redding Rancheria Chairman Jack Potter, Jr. with a moving invocation.

NCAI President Mark Macarro then discussed the role of law enforcement, justice, and public safety in Native communities during the President's Report. He emphasized the importance of leadership and engagement in Indian Country, particularly noting the opportunities present at ECWS for collaboration and collective action.

Following President Macarro, the first Congressional Update was delivered by Brian Schatz, U.S. Senator for Hawai'i and Chairman of the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. He emphasized his commitment to working alongside Tribal Nations and emphasized the significance of the \$73 million in funding allocated to 39 tribal governments approved in June 2023 under the American Rescue Plan's State Small Business Credit Initiative (SSBCI).

U.S. Treasurer Lynn Malerba then delivered the Treasury Update and emphasized the importance of equitable inclusion, respect in government-to-government relationships, consultations with Tribal Nations, and supporting tribal communities and economies.

Jackson Brossy, Assistant Administrator of the Office of Native American Affairs at the Small Business Administration (SBA), followed by discussing the importance of input from Tribal Nations in fostering a new era of self-determination, along with resources like SBA Counselors and SBA Development Centers to help Native entrepreneurs grow their businesses.

Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan (White Earth Band of Ojibwe), the highest-ranking Native woman in a state-wide office, gave a speech focusing on the



importance of tribal decision-making, tribal autonomy on legal matters such as crime response and investigation, and the innate right of Native people to govern themselves.

NCAI's Larry Wright, Jr. then delivered the Executive Director's Report. He spoke about the importance of advancing NCAI's 80-year legacy and mission of protecting sovereignty rights, preserving Native cultures, and improving the lives of Native people. Highlighting the power of collaboration, he also discussed how NCAI is working with partners to revitalize the "Budget Book," a key resource to bolster advocacy for stronger federal funding in Indian Country.

Bryan Newland, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs at the U.S. Department of the Interior, delivered the Indian Affairs update in which he emphasized the importance of following through with making funds more accessible to Tribal Nations by removing bureaucratic barriers.

Patrice Kunesch, Commissioner of the Administration for Native American Affairs, and Rebecca Gaston, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, discussed leading the way in support of tribal

communities and youth. They spoke of working alongside Tribal Nations to enhance services and support for children, youth, and families.

The Army Civil Works Update was presented by Michael Connor, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works in the Department of the Army under the Department of Defense. Connor underscored his commitment to integrating indigenous knowledge and enhancing tribal land protections and also revealed the Army Civil Works' plans for collaborative projects to help streamline Tribal Nations' efforts to protect their lands with fewer bureaucratic hurdles.

Shalanda Young, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, emphasized progress in projects such as Indian Health Service (IHS) funding stability and developing a dedicated tribal position.

Denis McDonough, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, highlighted the importance of providing culturally sensitive care to veterans. He discussed how the Department is working on a partnership with IHS to expand care for Native veterans.

Secretary Deb Haaland of the U.S. Department of the Interior, followed with her presentation which emphasized the role of Native stewardship, infrastructure, and healing from historical traumas. She also acknowledged the White House's \$45 billion investments in tribal infrastructure and climate resilience.

The U.S. Navy Update was provided by Meredith Berger, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Energy, Installations, and Environment) of the Department of the Navy under the Department of Defense. She highlighted the Navy's commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable infrastructure, which she explained are crucial for ecosystem protection and military readiness. She also highlighted the appointment of the Navy's first director for tribal affairs, enhancing liaison programs across the Navy & Marine Corps.

The First Plenary Session concluded with a Fireside Chat alongside Gina Raimondo, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Commerce. In her remarks, she discussed boosting Native economies, such as through enhancing broadband connectivity, workforce development, and environmental sustainability.

## Listening Sessions, Task Forces, and Working Groups

The afternoon sessions included a variety of federal listening sessions and task forces. The listening session to Inform Federal Agencies' Environmental Justice Strategic Plans where members of Indian Country were able to speak directly to federal partners on issues of climate justice. During the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (AVYF) Listening Session tribal leaders stressed the importance of increasing funding, trauma-informed care, and staffing for social services across Indian Country.

Tuesday's task force sessions included both Budget and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. The Budget Task Force focused on discussing the federal government's budgets and appropriations processes, while the Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Task Force met to discuss current tribal, Administrative, and



Congressional priorities to improve the function of TANF programs for Tribal Nations across Indian Country. Additionally, the Peyote Working Group met to discuss the current landscape of peyote conservation and preservation.



## NCAI Youth Commission/CNAY Reception

The 2024 Native Youth Leadership Summit (NYLS) is an annual gathering of youth leaders hosted by the NCAI Youth Commission in Washington, D.C. during the NCAI Executive Council Winter Session. The summit elevates youth voices, strengthens leadership development, and encourages advocacy for issues affecting their communities. This year's agenda provided prime opportunities for Native Youth to learn advocacy strategies through the Tribal Nations Action Initiative Training, learn about the White House Native Youth Pathways internship, and network with peers and tribal leaders from across Indian Country.

In addition, the NCAI Youth Commission and the Center for Native American Youth (CNAY) partnered to host a reception during NYLS to celebrate youth advocacy in Indian Country on Tuesday night. More than 140 attendees engaged in networking activities, enjoyed a meal, and celebrated the 2024 CNAY Champions for Change. Each

year, CNAY amplifies the impactful work of inspirational Native youth, or Champions for Change, between the ages of 14 and 24 who are driving positive change in their communities. At the reception, five outstanding Champions for Change were honored:

**Taylor Higgins**, Seldovia Village Tribe, University of Alaska Anchorage

**Sage Phillips**, Penobscot Nation, University of Connecticut

**Ian Teller**, Navajo, Diné College

**Wambli Gleska Quintana**, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and Navajo Nation, Dupree High School  
Jeidah DeZurney, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Multnomah Education Service District

In honor of their unique interests, projects, and accomplishments, each Champion received a medallion and a \$5,000 scholarship from the Native Forward Scholars Fund.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

## Second Plenary Session

The Second Plenary Session at ECWS 2024 began with an invocation by NCAI Rocky Mountain Regional Vice President Jennifer Finley of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. She emphasized the importance of collaboration and solidarity within Indian Country. The session began with a robust panel discussion on Executive Order 14112, or “Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations To Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination.” The panel featured Elizabeth Carr, Tribal Advisor to the Director, at the Office of Management and Budget; Elizabeth Reese, Senior Policy Advisor for Native Affairs at the White House Domestic Policy Council; and Rose Petoskey, Senior Advisor and Tribal Affairs Director at the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs. They discussed the Administration’s dedication to improving tribal sovereignty and access to federal programs for Indian Country through the establishment of a Budget Task Force & Federal Funding Reform Task Force under E.O. 14112.

Next, Rep. Sharice Davids (Kansas) highlighted the previous victory of advance appropriations for Indian Health Service (IHS) for Indian Country and emphasized the critical need for Native voices in shaping the Farm Bill.

U.S. Department of Education Secretary Dr. Miguel Cardona then delivered the Department of Education Update. He discussed the agency’s commitment to Native language revitalization through the development of Native language centers and teacher retention initiatives.

Dr. Kilolo Kijakazi, Principal Senior Advisor to the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration (SSA) at the Social Security Administration, shared updates on SSA’s commitment to Indian Country, including the agency’s first Native Language Action Plan to reduce barriers & ensure equitable access to benefits, and stronger partnerships for better service delivery.



Rep. Mary Peltola (Alaska) then addressed the plenary audience and highlighted critical needs in Indian Country, emphasizing the chronic underfunding of tribal agencies and the importance of bipartisan support for Native issues. She urged for more leaders to step up and engage at all levels of government.

The Department of Transportation Update was provided by Arlando Teller, Assistant Secretary for Tribal Government Affairs at the Department of Transportation. Teller, the first Assistant Secretary for Tribal Government Affairs, emphasized safety and accessibility in transportation for tribal communities, noting his commitment to a path for inclusive infrastructure.

Following this, Dominique Blom, General Deputy Assistant Secretary at the Public and Indian Housing under the Department of Housing and Urban Development, emphasized the Administration’s commitment to improving tribal consultation and strengthening nation-to-nation relationships, emphasizing the Department’s efforts to assess and meet the true funding needs of Indian Country.



The Director of the U.S. Census Bureau, Robert Santos, then spoke about the importance of tribal engagement and collaboration for accurate representation and data sovereignty.

In the next Congressional Update, Minnesota Rep. Betty McCollum talked about recent advancements in tribal healthcare funding such as IHS advanced appropriations, a move she believes will save lives. She stressed the importance of bipartisan support for tribal funding and the obligation to protect tribal culture and natural resources.

Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski and Minnesota Senator Tina Smith joined the session virtually to discuss the impact of Native advocacy and supportive measures like the Violence Against Women Act, Farm Bill, self-governance, and the federal government's trust and treaty obligations to Tribal Nations.

Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) Director Tony Dearman took the stage to discuss the need for high-quality, culturally relevant education, and how the BIE is working to support and revitalize tribal languages.

Minority Leader of the U.S. House of Representatives Hakeem Jeffries provided remarks in which he reaffirmed his commitment to honor and respect Tribal Nations, highlighting the resilience and strength of Native peoples. In his remarks, Rep. Jeffries pledged to prioritize tribal sovereignty and advocate for advanced appropriations to address under-resourcing in Indian Country.

Following this, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Fireside Chat featured Xochitl Torres Small, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture at the USDA, and Heather Dawn Thompson, Director of the Office of Tribal Relations at the USDA. They highlighted co-stewardship of federal lands, Native foods, and funding challenges for tribal communities.

The Department of Justice (DOJ) Update was presented by JoAnn Kintz, Deputy Director of the Office of Tribal Justice under the Department of Justice. She addressed critical public safety challenges, focusing on combating the Missing or Murdered Indigenous People and the fentanyl

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*“We are committed to making sure that just as you stand with us, more importantly, we will continue to stand with you. Always lifting up and respecting tribal sovereignty.”*

- House Minority Leader  
Hakeem Jeffries

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crisis. Kintz emphasized commitment to sovereignty and partnership with Tribal Nations.

Carol Scott, Esq., former Legislative Chair of the Veterans and Military Law Section of the Federal Bar, gave the Tribal Veterans Service Officers Update in which she advocated for Native veterans' rights and benefits. She emphasized the historical struggles and ongoing efforts to secure recognition and support for Native warriors and urged communities to invest in and support these officers to keep veterans connected to their culture and community.

The Director of the Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) at the U.S. Department of Justice, Rose Hidalgo, gave the OVW Update. She discussed efforts to prevent and address domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, sex trafficking, and other interconnected forms of gender-based violence against Native people. She also celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act, mentioning the key role of NCAI in every reauthorization of the Act.

Next, NCAI's First Vice President Brian Weeden introduced the 2024 CNAY Champions for Change to ECWS attendees: Jeidah DeZurney, Wambli Quintana, Ian Teller, Tayler Tanginiq Higgins, and Sage Phillips.

The Second Plenary Session closed with a Congressional Update from Rep. Frank Pallone (NJ), who discussed the importance of specified health programs for Native Americans and the harmful impact of Native “themed” mascots in sports and popular culture.

# 25th Annual NCAI Leadership Awards Banquet

Later on Wednesday, February 14, NCAI honored three distinguished leaders in Indian Country at the 25th Annual Leadership Awards Ceremony. The awards are presented annually to individuals, groups, or organizations who serve as champions for Indian Country in their respective fields.

## Leadership Award winners included:

**Native American Leadership Award** - Fawn Sharp, Quinault Indian Nation

Fawn Sharp, Vice President of the Quinault Indian Nation, was awarded for her significant contributions to the rights and well-being of Tribal Nations. Throughout her tenure as the 23rd President of NCAI and third female leader, Sharp played a pivotal role in advancing the rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives worldwide, particularly focusing on climate change and environmental justice.

**Congressional Leadership Award** – Senator Tina Smith (Minnesota)

Sen. Tina Smith was awarded for her exceptional dedication to Tribal Nations and as a tireless advocate in addressing the diverse needs of the state of Minnesota. Notably, her career highlights include many bipartisan achievements in passing over 70 bills, notably in healthcare, broadband, education, and Indian Affairs.

**Special Recognition Award** – Head Councilman Joe Garcia, Ohkay Owingeh

This year's Special Recognition Award is a tribute to the significant lifetime achievements of a dedicated leader, and this year NCAI honored the memory of the late Head Councilman Joe Garcia. A revered leader and culture keeper for his people, Joe Garcia's contributions as the NCAI Southwest Region Vice President and former NCAI President reflected his unwavering commitment to fostering collaboration and solidarity among Tribal Nations. His tireless dedication to uplift and empower all Native communities solidified his reputation as a champion for Indian Country.



**Fawn Sharp**  
Quinault Indian Nation



**Senator Tina Smith**  
Minnesota



**Head Councilman Joe Garcia**  
Ohkay Owingeh

## Task Force Sessions

Wednesday's Task Force Sessions included Addiction, IGA-NCAI, Native Languages, Technology, and Tribal Border. The NCAI Addiction Task Force discussed administrative and legislative priorities to increase access and improve the function of behavioral health and addiction programs at the tribal level. The Addiction Task Force continues to support efforts to advance education, treatment, preventative services, and public safety in tribal communities.

The Joint Indian Gaming Association (IGA) and NCAI

Task Force was reinstated this year to discuss the current legal threats to tribal sovereignty and formulate responses to defend against continued attacks on sovereignty, particularly in the courts. The Native Languages Task Force met to discuss Native American language protection and revitalization from tribal leaders' perspectives.

The NCAI Technology Task Force featured a conversation about connectivity on agricultural land to support demand for precision agriculture and accelerated broadband deployment on unserved agricultural lands.



## NCAI Foundation Reception

Later Wednesday evening, the NCAI Foundation hosted a reception and welcomed leaders from key organizations like the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition (NABS), National Indian Health Board (NIHB), and Native American Finance Officers Association (NAFOA) to discuss philanthropy and funding in Indian Country.

NCAI Foundation President Greg Masten (Yurok and descendant of the Hupa and Karuk Tribes), alongside NCAI President Mark Macarro and Executive Director Larry Wright Jr., were joined by NABS Chief Executive Officer Deb Parker (Tulip/Yaqui/Apache), NIHB Chief Executive Officer Stacey Bohlen (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians), and NAFOA Interim Executive Director Susan Masten (Yurok) to address the vital need for strategic support and funding mechanisms for tribal communities, emphasizing the role of collaborative efforts in driving sustainable growth and prosperity.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

## Capitol Hill Visits

On Thursday morning, NCAI in a powerful collaboration with several partner organizations, took to Capitol Hill to elevate the collective voice of Indian Country and advocate for the rights and well-being of Native people. This concerted effort was a testament to the unity and strength that tribal leaders and allies bring to the forefront in the ongoing quest for justice and equity.

The day's activities were kickstarted by the Indian Gaming Association, which opened its doors to about 30 tribal leaders for coffee and special visits from a few of Indian Country's champions in Congress, including U.S. Reps. Mary Peltola (Alaska), Sharice Davids (Kansas), Gwen Moore (Wisconsin), and Harriet Hageman (Wyoming). Their presence underscored the bipartisan support for Tribal Nations, reinforcing the importance of continued dialogue and partnership with federal policymakers.

This initial meetup offered a prime opportunity for tribal leaders to come together, share strategies, and strengthen their collective resolve in anticipation of the day's



forthcoming meetings. Furthermore, the engagement and backing of essential partner organizations—the National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, National Indian Health Board, National Council on Urban Indian Health, National Indian Education Association, and the Native Farm Bill Coalition—enriched the day's proceedings. Each organization brought to the table its unique advocacy perspectives and strengths, contributing significantly to the unified effort to champion the causes of Indian Country.

About two dozen tribal leaders visited more than 30 offices on Capitol Hill, engaging in discussions about a range of critical issues impacting Tribal Nations and their citizens.

