



Native American Heritage Month

Vice Chair Jeannie Hovland

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November is a month where many in the United States prepare for the holiday season which often includes the gathering of family and friends who feast together creating new and lasting memories. November is also the month where we celebrate Veterans Day and recognize America's heroes who served in the armed forces fighting for and defending our freedoms as citizens of the United States. Native American's have served in the armed forces at a higher rate than any other demographic, serving in wars before we were even citizens of the United States. That is part of who we are as Native peoples, warriors, and protectors of our people and land. I do not believe it is coincidental that November is also designated as Native American Heritage Month.

The COVID-19 pandemic awakened the United States as to the social, economic, and health inequities that many tribal communities continue to endure since the creation of reservations. But during this tragic time the world also witnessed the warrior spirit of tribal leaders who rose up to protect their communities, exercising their rights as sovereign nations, and fighting for resources to combat the virus. Once again, showing that our history, as Native Peoples, has endured much adversity, but in the end not only will we continue to be resilient, we will continue to be prosperous, banding together to remain steadfast in passing down our ancestors legacies of strength and fortitude. In the Dakota/Lakota/Nakota way, Mitkaye Oyasin, we are all related, so when one of our tribal nations grieve, we all grieve and feel the loss, when one of our tribal nations celebrates a victory, we are encouraged and empowered by it.

As the Vice Chair of the National Indian Gaming Commission, I am proud of the hard work and dedication of the NIGC team who, throughout the pandemic, checked in regularly with the tribal gaming operations, offering support, seeking input, and working together to make sure the tribal gaming operations were safe for those who work there and patrons that visit.



The tribal gaming industry has had so many positive impacts for tribes, their communities, and the surround communities, including offering a variety of diverse and competitive career opportunities, building stronger economies, and helping dollars spent to stay in the local community.

Reflecting on Native American Heritage Month, the definition of “heritage” includes words such as honor, pride, and courage and something that comes or belongs to one by reason of birth. Along with celebrating the rich cultures, languages, traditions, foods, and skills of Native Americans, we must also acknowledge the history that we, as Native American’s, have is different from that of most Americans. Our languages, our ways of worship, and our traditions were forbidden, our communities were displaced, and our families were dismantled through the boarding school era. As resilient people, we continue to heal from the past, rebuild our families and communities, restore our languages, and revive our culture.

Our country is also in need of healing, we must all strive to form positive relationships, respect the differences of others, and view diversity as a strength. We can choose to build a brighter future for the next seven generations and leave a footprint that creates a history we can all be proud of.

I am thankful for the opportunity to witness and be a part of the astounding achievements we are accomplishing as Native Americans. May this month highlight and remind us that together we can achieve more and by sharing our stories we can help spread awareness to the culture, history and impact the Native American people have in this world.