



National Congress of American Indians

MID YEAR23

Convention & Marketplace

June 4-8, 2023 | Prior Lake, Minnesota

Mid Year 2023 Convention & Marketplace **WRAP UP REPORT**



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VIDEO WRAP UP!



Saturday, June 3, 2023

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) leadership gathered on Saturday for the NCAI Fund Board and NCAI Executive Committee meetings. NCAI officers and representatives from NCAI's twelve regions offered feedback on the business of the organization and outlined priorities for the week ahead and the remainder of 2023.



Sunday, June 4, 2023

NCAI Golf Tournament Fundraiser

Hosted by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community (SMSC) at “The Meadows at Mystic Lake”, the 2023 Mid Year Golf Tournament featured a Four-Person Team Scramble format with a shotgun start. Teams from across Indian Country competed for five placement trophies and closest to the pin and longest drive prizes. Generous sponsors of the event were featured on holes around the golf course and celebrated during the awards ceremony.



Champion golfers show off their trophies at the post-round awards ceremony.



Executive Director Larry Wright, Jr. and Northeast Regional Vice President Lance Gumbs pose with their team at Mystic Lake Golf Course.

Local Tours

Hosted by the Local Planning Committee, attendees not interested in spending the day on the golf course were offered an opportunity to tour the area on one of three trips: the Prairie Island Indian Community Buffalo Tour, the Owámniyomni and Wíta Wanáǵi (St. Anthony Falls) Tour, or the Organics Recycling Facility and Water Reclamation Facility Tour. The Buffalo Tour featured a ride in a specially created flatbed truck which safely drove participants into a pasture owned and managed by the Prairie Island Indian Community for a view from within the middle of the herd. Participants enjoyed a scenic ride and learned about the significance of the buffalo to the Dakota Tribe. The Owámniyomni and Wíta Wanáǵi Tour took attendees to a place of great spiritual significance to local Tribal Nations. Although the sites have been heavily desecrated and transformed through colonization and industrialization, “The Falls Initiative” is transforming Owámniyomni (St. Anthony Falls) to create a place of healing, restoration, learning, and connection at the site of the Upper Lock on the Central Riverfront of Minneapolis. Participants learned about this Native-led process and pondered the negative realities which transformed the locations while admiring the resilience and strength which is returning them to their original beauty. The Organics Recycling Facility and Water Reclamation Facility Tour, hosted by SMSC, featured an in-depth presentation of the SMSC’s environmental projects.



Monday, June 5, 2023



Songs from the Timber Trails Drum Group open the first General Assembly.

The official start of the 2023 Mid Year Convention & Marketplace business began on Monday, June 5, with the **First General Assembly**. Following a procession of Native veterans accompanied by songs from the Timber Trails Drum Group, the session began with an invocation provided by Andrew Vig (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community).

NCAI President Fawn Sharp called the General Assembly to order by welcoming NCAI members and guests from across Indian Country. Before launching into the agenda, President Sharp welcomed Governor J. Michael Chavarria (Santa Clara Pueblo), NCAI Southwest Regional Vice President, to the stage for a special memorial presentation in honor of former NCAI President, Head Councilman Joe Garcia (Ohkay Owingeh). Following the moving tribute, the Local Planning Committee—represented on stage by NCAI Midwest Regional Vice President

Rebecca Crooks Stratton (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community), NCAI Midwest Regional Vice President Alternate Shelly Buck (Prairie Island Indian Community), and NCAI Treasurer Shannon Holsey (Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians)—welcomed attendees to the Midwest Region and the beautiful lands of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

President Sharp then delivered her report to NCAI membership, calling upon tribal leaders and citizens to stand with NCAI, stay engaged in advocacy for tribal priorities, and work together as the organization builds upon the vision of its founders 80 years ago. “Every single time we come together to do this work, it is honorable...every time we call out in prayer, we invite eight decades of ancestors to enjoin us in defending tribal sovereignty,” she said, as she rallied support for NCAI’s growing membership

ahead of its milestone Annual Convention in November. NCAI Executive Director Larry Wright, Jr. (Ponca Tribe of Nebraska) took the stage next to deliver his report before the General Assembly. As NCAI approaches its 80th Annual Convention, Executive Director Wright emphasized that Tribal Nations and members can expect a complete return to the vision of the NCAI founders in all that the organization does.

Throughout the week, General Assembly attendees at the 2023 Mid Year Convention heard from representatives of federal agencies and elected tribal, state, and federal leaders, among others. Speakers provided updates and shared best practice approaches to keep attendees informed of the latest policy developments and relay opportunities to protect and enhance the sustainability of tribal lands, airs, and waters. The U.S. Senators representing Minnesota kicked off Monday's impressive agenda of federal government updates. In her virtual remarks, Senator Amy Klobuchar spoke to the importance of working for the benefit of children seven generations ahead. Senator Tina Smith used her time on stage to address the importance of respecting and strengthening tribal sovereignty within the walls of Congress: "Tribal sovereignty and self-determination is not optional...it is inherent and enshrined in the Constitution, and centuries of laws and treaties," she expressed to great acclaim.

Next, attendees heard from Peter Vicaire, Tribal Government Relations Specialist at the Department of Veterans Affairs, who provided an update on recent legislation, including new rules allowing veterans dealing with toxic exposure to receive



Executive Director Wright delivers his report before NCAI membership.

assistance. Issues impacting Native veterans are crucially important at NCAI, especially for Executive Director Wright who is also a veteran. "We will work together in new ways that will make a major impact on the lives of our current and former servicemen and women," he said upon announcing quarterly meetings and regular updates on policy issues affecting Native veterans. Representatives from the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs were next to provide updates. U.S. Senators Brian Schatz (HI) and Lisa Murkowski (AK) each provided virtual remarks, while Jennifer Romero, Majority Staff Director and Chief Counsel, and Amber Ebarb, Minority Staff Director, took the stage to share important information with attendees. "Over the past two years, we've secured the most funding for Native communities in United States history," shared Senator Schatz. "We must look to Native people to incorporate indigenous knowledge into our work at the federal level," added Senator Murkowski, emphasizing the importance of including Native voices at the decision-making table.



U.S. Treasurer Lynn Malerba delivers the Department of the Treasury update

Chief Marilynn Malerba (Mohegan), U.S. Treasurer, took the stage next to share updates on behalf of the Department of the Treasury. Treasurer Malerba assured the audience that the Department's immediate priority is to engage with all partners and ensure proper consultation with Tribal Nations. "We want Indian Country to weigh in on how we should be distributing money," she said. Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, Bryan Newland (Bay Mills Indian Community), provided updates on behalf of the Department of the Interior. "It's our trust responsibility to protect the existence of Indian tribes, support tribal sovereignty and protect Indian families. That's our trust responsibility to every tribe," he said as he emphasized the Department's commitment to uplifting tribal communities and voices.

Judge Kevin H. Sharp, Co-Vice Chairman, Sanford, Heisler, Sharp, LLP, provided an update on clemency efforts for Leonard Peltier before President Sharp closed the First General Assembly and transitioned the audience to its first Lunch Speaker Series of the week. New to the 2023 Mid Year Convention

& Marketplace, the Lunch Speaker Series provided attendees a free buffet lunch amidst presentations from special guest speakers. Monday's lunch featured Secretary Deb Haaland, Department of the Interior, and Minnesota Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan. Secretary Haaland highlighted efforts to advance co-stewardship opportunities and spoke to the Department's healing tour as part of its Boarding School Initiative. "We are undertaking a comprehensive effort to recognize the legacy of boarding school policies with the goal of addressing their intergenerational impacts and bringing peace and healing today," she said. Lt. Governor Flanagan focused her speech on the importance of Native

"It's our trust responsibility to protect the existence of Indian tribes, support tribal sovereignty and protect Indian families. That's our trust responsibility to every tribe,"
 – Bryan Newland, Secretary for Indian Affairs

representation at every level of government and across popular media. "We are part of the fabric of every future...we should have a seat at every table deciding the future of every community," she stressed as she emphasized the expertise each tribal community holds.

Monday afternoon included Regional Caucus meetings and concurrent sessions featuring tribal consultations, information sessions, and important policy discussions. The Marketplace Welcome Reception, featuring food and presentations from the NCAI Youth Commission, concluded Monday's agenda.

Tuesday, June 6, 2023



The International Climate Issues and Indigenous Peoples panel discusses how Indigenous communities around the world are addressing the impacts of climate change.

Co-sponsored by Great Lakes Inter-Tribal Epidemiology Center (GLITEC) and NCAI's Movement is Medicine Program, a health walk kicked off Tuesday morning. The event allowed participants to enjoy a beautiful morning walk along the golf cart path at The Meadows Golf Course. Attendees received t-shirts and a light grab-and-go-breakfast before beginning the day in a good way.

Later that morning, the **Second General Assembly** was called to order by NCAI 1st Vice President Mark Macarro (Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians). Following an invocation from Margo Prescott (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community), President Sharp moderated a round table discussion examining the impacts of climate change on Indigenous peoples and how communities are responding across the globe. Titled International Climate Issues and Indigenous Peoples, the panel featured Frank Ettawageshik (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians), President, Association

on American Indian Affairs, and Anthony Morgan Rodman (Cherokee Nation, Osage Nation), Executive Director for the White House Council on Native American Affairs, Department of the Interior. "Indigenous peoples are experiencing a new era unfolding worldwide," stressed Rodman. "As Native people, we share a central part of our understanding of our relationship with the world... it's that understanding that is actually going to save the world," added Ettawageshik.

Ambassador Lance Gumbs (Shinnecock Nation), NCAI Northeast Regional Vice President, invited other tribal leaders from the East coast to join him on stage for the next presentation—an update on offshore wind energy. Alongside Ambassador Gumbs, Chairwoman Cheryl Andrews-Maltais (Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head) and Administrator Reggie Tupponce (Upper Mattaponi), NCAI Southeast Regional Vice President, relayed concerns for the ongoing development of offshore wind projects



CoVice President Charli Earth and Public Relations Representative Sharon Bassette deliver an update on behalf of the NCAI Youth Commission.

by the federal government without sufficient tribal consultation. “Wind farms will forever change the waters that have sustained our coastal ways of life... we’re in the fight of our lives,” said Chairwoman Andrews-Maltais as she stressed the importance of this issue. Further conversations related to offshore wind energy continued throughout the week. Next, the NCAI Youth Commission, represented by Co-Vice President Charli Earth (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska) and Public Relations Representative Sharon Bassette (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska), provided an update which emphasized that youth are not only leaders of tomorrow, but leaders of today before 1st Vice President Macarro closed the Second General Assembly.

Attendees dispersed to participate in various Task Force meetings before returning for the second Lunch Speaker Series of the week, this time featuring Patrice Kunesh (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), Commissioner, Administration for Native American Affairs (ANA), and Elizabeth Carr (Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians), Tribal Advisor to the

“We demand a seat at the table where our voices will be heard.” – Charli Earth

Director, Office of Management and Budget (OMB). “Our languages allow us to understand the history of our ancestors,” said Kunesh as she highlighted the emphasis the ANA is placing on working with Tribal Nations to ensure our languages are intact for the generations to come. “It’s my mission to engage with all of you across Indian Country to ensure that the decisions OMB makes truly reflect tribal needs,” stressed Carr as she outlined the importance of reciprocal tribal consultation at OMB.

After lunch, attendees again gathered for Regional Caucus meetings before beginning the business of the Congress in Subcommittees later in the afternoon. Tuesday’s agenda closed with laughter and excitement as attendees enjoyed a Comedy Night arranged by the Local Planning Committee. Standup acts included comedians Rob Fairbanks, Mylo Smith, and Don Burnstick.



Comedian Mylo Smith performs a standup set during Comedy Night

Wednesday, June 7, 2023

NCAI Treasurer Shannon Holsey (Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians) called the **Third General Assembly** to order Wednesday morning. Caitlyn Welch (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community) provided the invocation before Treasurer Holsey introduced the Water Scarcity and Conservation roundtable discussion moderated by Governor J. Michael Chavarria (Santa Clara Pueblo). Featuring panelists Jamie Pinkham (Nez Perce), Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Army (Civil Works), Department of the Army, Sarah LeFlore (Choctaw Nation), Policy Analyst, Secretary's Indian Water Rights Office, Department of the Interior, Councilmember Bobby Page (Colorado River Indian Tribes), and Doug Crow Ghost Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux Tribe), Chairman, Great Plains Tribal Water Alliance, the discussion focused on water scarcity and conservation efforts, examining existing and future challenges and how Tribal Nations are taking action to safeguard the water that sustains their people. "The federal government must remove the restrictions which prevent Tribal Nations from using their water," said Councilmember Page. "Let's get to the table first," added Doug Crow Ghost Jr., as the panelists emphasized the importance of protecting precious and sacred water in and around our tribal communities.

Next, PaaWee Rivera (Pueblo of Pojoaque), Senior Advisor and Tribal Affairs Director, White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, took the stage to provide attendees an update on behalf of the White House. "Our nation's story continues to be one of



PaaWee Rivera provides the White House Update to a packed General Assembly.

progress, prosperity, and resilience," said Rivera as he highlighted President Biden's commitment to working with Tribal Nations to promote prosperous futures for tribal communities. Rivera further emphasized the Administration's promise to engage in robust consultation with Tribal Nations, saying "I look forward to building our nation-to-nation partnership and working with you to unlock new opportunities for Native communities." Treasurer Holsey closed the Third General Assembly before attendees again made their way to another slate of important Task Force meetings ahead of the final Lunch Speaker Series of the week.



The Grow With Google panel discusses important tech resources available to Tribal Nations and citizens.

Wednesday's Lunch Speaker Series featured two panel discussions: The Emerging Importance of Tribal Data Sovereignty and Resources for Tribal Nations from Grow With Google. NCAI Executive Director Larry Wright, Jr. moderated the first panel discussion featuring Dawson Her Many Horses (Rosebud), Senior Vice President and Head of Native American Banking, Wells Fargo, and Andy Huff (Chippewa Cree Tribe), Senior Policy and Legal Advisor, Center for Indian Country Development. "The importance of up-to-date data in Indian Country cannot be overstated," said Huff as the panelists stressed the urgency with which Tribal Nations must pursue and obtain accurate data to tell their stories in their voices. NCAI Director of Communications Yawna Allen (Quapaw, Cherokee, Yuchi) moderated the Grow With Google panel featuring panelists Henry Jake Foreman (Absentee Shawnee), Indigenous Community Digital Coach, Grow With Google; Grace Perez, YouTube Marketing, Global Strategy & Operations; Katie Tobin, Head of Workspace Innovation, Global Public Sector at Google Cloud;

and Chenoa Scippio (Navajo Nation), Co-President, National UNITY Council Executive Committee. "General literacy has quickly become a foundational skill in today's work environment," said Perez as the panelists emphasized the pivotal role technology plays in bridging the digital divide that exists in Indian Country.

After lunch, attendees gathered again for the final Regional Caucus meetings of the week before continuing the business of the Congress in Committees later in the afternoon. Breakout sessions were also hosted Wednesday afternoon, including panel discussions covering water rights, sovereignty, voter registration, and housing. Wednesday's agenda closed with Culture Night, an evening to celebrate the traditions and cultural ways of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community and Local Planning Committee. Hosted by SMSC at Hočokata Ti, their cultural center and gathering space, the night included opportunities to tour the cultural exhibit, make an art project, learn Dakota words, and enjoy traditional food made by SMSC enterprises.



Attendees enjoy Cultural Night festivities at Hočokata Ti.

Thursday, June 8, 2023



Panelists address emerging issues in the 2023 Farm Bill to open the final General Assembly of the Convention.

NCAI President Fawn Sharp called the **Fourth General Assembly** to order Thursday morning before Andrew Vig (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community) again provided the invocation. First to the stage was the Emerging Issues in the 2023 Farm Bill panel discussion, moderated by NCAI Policy Lead, Environmental Sustainability and Natural Resources, Quinn Buchwald (Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana). Panelists Kayla Gebeck Carroll (Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians), Associate, Holland & Knight, Abi Fain (Choctaw Nation), Policy and Government Relations Director, Intertribal Agriculture Council, Carly Hotvedt (Cherokee Nation), Associate Director, Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative, University of Arkansas, assessed the challenges which exist that may preclude tribal priorities from the Farm

Bill and what steps tribal leaders can take to help get the legislation passed with improved provisions for tribal communities. “We are always looking for better representation from tribal communities,” said Hotvedt, stressing the importance of Tribal Nations identifying their needs and seeking opportunities to make their voices heard.

Brenda Mallory, Chair, White House Council on Environmental Quality, provided an update on Tribal Nations and environmental sustainability, noting that “one of President Biden’s core missions is to invest in the capacity of tribes to develop solutions to protect and enhance their own communities and natural habitats.” Next, Melody McCoy (Cherokee Nation), Staff Attorney, Native American Rights Fund, delivered the Tribal Supreme Court Project



President Sharp welcomes the Resolutions Committee Co-Chairs to the stage to provide their report to NCAI membership.

Update, highlighting important tribal cases from the October 2022 SCOTUS term. President Sharp then introduced Jacqueline De León (Isleta Pueblo), Staff Attorney, Native American Rights Fund, to provide a voting rights update. “Native communities are poised to make a tremendous difference in the upcoming election,” said De León as she stressed the importance of taking steps to ensure each tribal community is ready to vote in 2024.

Minnesota Governor Tim Walz took the stage next to outline his administration’s approach to tribal-state relations. “Relationships are foundational to the work we do...here in Minnesota, we are committed to preserving the government-to-government relationships with our sovereign Tribal Nations,” said Governor Walz to broad commendation. Teresa Sheldon (Tulalip Tribes), Director of Policy and Advocacy, Native American Boarding School Healing

Coalition (NABS), provided the final update of the Fourth General Assembly, outlining NABS’ efforts to work with Congress to pass a bill establishing a Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies.

President Sharp then handed the floor over to NCAI Resolutions Committee Co-Chair W. Ron Allen (Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe) to introduce NCAI’s Committee Chairs for their reports. Following the delivery of Committee reports, Rebecca Crooks-Stratton (Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community) shared closing remarks on behalf of the Local Planning Committee. President Sharp thanked the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community for being such gracious hosts during a productive week. She then directed attendees’ attention to NCAI’s 80th Annual Convention & Marketplace, to be held in New Orleans, Louisiana, on November 12-17, before adjourning the 2023 Mid Year Convention & Marketplace.



Governor Tim Walz delivers powerful remarks before a captivated audience.



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Youth Sessions



Throughout the Mid Year Convention & Marketplace, youth worked collaboratively to protect and advance tribal sovereignty as they engaged with an agenda—created by youth, for youth—which prioritized their involvement in discussions alongside tribal leaders.

The NCAI Youth Commission seeks to uplift youth voices, such that their impacts and leadership will be felt not only in the future, but in the present. In this way, youth participants at NCAI events are creating social change and advocating for their communities while giving voice to new perspectives on social injustices.

Pre-conference events included a discussion on environmental justice and a Youth Culture Camp.

At Hočokata Ti, youth participants learned about Dakota Culture and participated in an archery event and arts session. Youth sessions throughout the week focused on international advocacy, college preparedness, climate resilience, financial literacy, and civic engagement, among other topics.

The NCAI Youth Commission is passionate about advocating for their generation's inclusion in relevant discussions within their own tribal communities, and recognizes the importance of empowering Native youth to make a difference across Indian Country. The agenda they developed for the 2023 Mid Year Convention & Marketplace reflects this passion as they look to further expand their influence and impact at future events.

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