

2002 Policy Statement of the National Congress of American Indians
Considered and Passed by tribal representatives gathered at the NCAI 2002 Midyear Session

The NCAI was founded in 1944 in response to termination and assimilation policies that the United States forced upon the tribal governments in contradiction of their treaty rights and status as sovereign entities. NCAI stressed the need for unity and cooperation among tribal governments for the protection of their treaty and sovereign rights. Since 1944, the National Congress of American Indians has been working to inform the public and Congress on the governmental rights of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Over a half a century later, NCAI has grown to include 250 member tribes and thousands of individual members from throughout the United States, but our fundamental goals remain unchanged. Now as in the past, NCAI serves to secure for ourselves and our descendants the rights and benefits to which we are entitled; to enlighten the public toward the better understanding of Indian people; to preserve rights under Indian treaties or agreements with the United States; and to promote the common welfare of the American Indians and Alaska Natives. Specifically, we call for the following:

Respect for Tribal Governance and the Federal Trust Relationship

- Healthy government-to-government relations between the US and Tribal governments
- Creation and nurture of institutions and processes to support meaningful and respectful government-to-government dialogue and consultation processes
- Respect and support for Alaska Native tribal governments
- Recognition of Native Hawaiian rights
- Positive working relationships with our neighbor State governments
- Full exercise of Tribal self-determination and self-governance
- Fulfillment of the federal Trust Responsibility via adequate annual appropriations for federal Indian programs and renewed honor in the trusteeship of tribal lands and resources
- Freedom from dual taxation created by imposition of state taxes on Indian reservations
- Fair and prompt processes for placing land into trust to begin to restore a small fraction of the countless acres of land that the federal government itself has acknowledged were wrongly taken from tribes
- Full acknowledgement of tribal sovereignty, including tribal jurisdiction over law enforcement and judicial processes on tribal lands, and the inherent right to prudent exercise of governmental immunity
- Honorable fulfillment of US treaty obligations and recognition of treaty rights

Support for Healthy Native Communities and People

- Development of sustainable, diversified and vibrant economies in Indian Country
- Opportunities for employment training opportunities and meaningful employment at living wages for Indian people who wish to remain in their reservation communities
- Respect for tribal rights to make choices—just as states do—regarding revenue generation through taxation and pursuit of tribal business development in a range of areas, including gaming enterprises
- Provision of safe, affordable, and accessible quality housing for Indian people
- Improvement of transportation infrastructure and accessibility in Indian Country
- Concerted efforts to improve telecommunications and technology access in Indian communities
- Improved access to capital and financing options
- Fulfillment of the federal trust responsibility for Indian health, including full funding of need for health care services, preventive care, facilities maintenance and construction, and other components of a functional, tribally-driven Indian health care system, and full implementation of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act
- Renewed commitment to Indian education within the BIA school system and public schools, including full funding for tribally operated schools and resources for tribal language and culture programs in all schools with concentrations of Indian students
- Sustained support for tribal law enforcement and tribal courts
- Support for the unique needs of Indian youth, elders, veterans, and people with disabilities
- Enhanced tribal involvement and direct access to federal funds for TANF programs, adoption and foster care, and other social services
- Preservation of the important protections for Indian children and communities under the Indian Child Welfare Act
- Coordinated efforts to eliminate the devastating effects of alcohol and substance abuse in Indian and Alaska Native communities
- Protection of our environment, the quality of air, lands, and waters, preservation of healthy habitat for fish and wildlife, and restoration of endangered species
- Support for sustainable development of tribal resources
- Respect for exercise of tribal water rights
- Protection of tribal communities from the impacts of nuclear waste

Preservation of Human Dignity and Cultural Integrity

- Preservation of Native languages and free exercise of traditional practices
- Protection of sacred lands and practices, as well as access to and protected use of sacred sites no longer within tribal lands
- Free exercise of subsistence lifeways and protection of traditional crops and animal life integral to traditional tribal practices
- Full implementation of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act
- Recognition of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples internationally within the United Nations, the Organization of American States, and related arenas
- Cessation of discriminatory and derogatory practices against all people, including the use of Indian people as symbols and mascots for sports teams