



Rebuilding
Communities
Through Indian
Self-Reliance

Media Release

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Native American Heritage Day honors Indian Country By Ernie Stevens, Jr., Chairman

Today, America is officially celebrating Native American Heritage Day 2010. On October 29, 2010, President Obama issued a proclamation declaring November 2010 as National Native American Heritage Month and called on all Americans to commemorate this month with appropriate programs and activities, and to celebrate the Friday after Thanksgiving, Nov. 26, as Native American Heritage Day. The traditional celebration of Thanksgiving is not only a time for reflection on the blessings in an individual's heart but also a time of remembrance for the ancestors who cleared the way for our world today.

Throughout the month of November, people from all walks of life embraced the opportunities to celebrate Native American Heritage Month. Many throughout the country took the time to recognize and celebrate the cultural and historical contributions of Native Americans to the United States, including opportunities to increase awareness and understanding accurate historical contributions of tribes and people in their own neighboring area. Indian Country greatly appreciates the efforts made to better educate the general public on the heritage of tribes and their communities.

Native Americans have contributed much to the modern world: agriculture, government structure and democracy, defense, ecology, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, architecture, trading and much more. However, most Americans do not know of these contributions and often mischaracterize Indian Country's place on the quilt of American history. Native American Heritage Month is a time for the country to remember the ingenuity and generosity of Indian Country, upon which the seeds of American life, as we know it today, were sown generations ago.

As we celebrate Native American Heritage Day 2010, let us remember how our Native American people, as sovereign governments occupied these lands long before Europeans arrived, have continued to build upon the outstanding contributions to the history of America. Today we celebrate and recognize the generations of dedicated

Native American warriors who fought to maintain, strengthen and rebuild our way of life amidst the threats of the assimilation process. The strong presence of our culture and heritage can be attributed to these brave men and women leaders who persevered despite tremendous obstacles, to keep our heritage alive.

The month of November is also a time to remember our warriors on Veterans Day. Native Americans are perhaps the most patriotic of all Americans. Distinguished military service is the result of dedicated men and women from Indian Country volunteering their lives for the protection of family, friends and sacred homelands throughout history. To this day the warrior spirit is alive and well as Native Americans are the largest American demographic to volunteer for the Armed Forces. Let us not forget our Native American soldiers valiantly defending the frontlines of Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Although rife with moments of triumph and tragedy, history has shown that our Native American people have continued to add to the rich legacy of our nation with many accomplishments, contributions, and sacrifices. From the arrival of the European visitors, who were greeted in good faith and extended aid, peaceable accord, and good will by Native Americans that in turn brought about the Thanksgiving holiday celebrated today, to the establishment of the democratic society, fashioned from the government of the Five Civilized Tribes and the Iroquois Confederacy, Native Americans have continuously and selflessly lent themselves to the rising of this great nation. Today is a celebration of the foundation that the United States was built upon by way of the Native American spirit of independence, strength, adaptability, and resilience. The contributions of Native America to the American way of life are numerous, but through it all, Native American people have never sought praise, only acknowledgement, as the first sovereigns of this nation.

The recent economic climate has been a long and protracted experience bringing many Americans face to face with economic woe. The American automotive industry teetered on the brink of ruin while the subprime mortgage crisis had the world economies collectively holding their breath. A new reality emerged for America, soaring unemployment, recession and the severe tightening of wallets and purses across the country. Media outlets broadcasted the economic stagnation daily at the height of the crisis: scenes of families losing homes, people sleeping in tents and cars and foreclosure signs in affluent and lower class neighborhoods. For Indian Country, these challenges are nothing new because it has been the legacy tribes have overcome with the resiliency from five centuries past. Indian Country ingenuity and adaptability continued in the post-Columbus world and to this day we remain the ever-consummate survivors winning wars against hunger, poverty and wretchedness. Tribal sovereignty has never been stronger and we stand united in facing the challenges and successes

awaiting us in the distant horizon, doing its part to build upon Indian country and throughout.

President Obama stated in his proclamation that, “Our Native Americans have distinguished themselves as inventors, entrepreneurs, spiritual leaders, and scholars. Our debt to our first Americans is immense, as is our responsibility to ensure their fair, equal treatment and to honor the commitments we made to their forebears.” I encourage all to embrace this opportunity to promote the accurate history of Native America and to move this great nation away from the stereotypes and misinformation that have long tainted and distorted the account of a very proud, honorable, and patriotic people.

For Native American Heritage Day 2010, reflect upon Native Americans and how they are in fact the very fiber of our multi-hued American quilt. The tenets Americans hold sacred, those of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness were a way of life for Indian Country long before those words were penned to paper. Indian Country has always been civilized and educated. Native American tribes are self-governing nations operating tribal governments and exercising sovereignty. The concept of community and caring for tribal members is paramount for Indian Country, which has understood since the beginning that self-determination is cooperation and working together. In today’s world this philosophy is exercised far beyond the reservation boundaries.

Native Americans today carry the legacy of survival from our ancestors and we are teaching the generations of tomorrow about resiliency, dedication and our many contributions. It is a credit to our previous generations that we have this opportunity. Our ancestors sacrificed immensely to give hope for the dream of a better tomorrow. Self-determination and a happy life was the realization of our ancestor’s vision of the strength of generations surviving insurmountable odds.

Recognition of Native American Heritage Day is powerful because it is an enduring symbol of this country’s appreciation and respect for America’s First Sovereigns. Let us never forget that the strength and resiliency of our young nation was possible only because of the generosity and empathy our ancestors shared with the unknown European immigrants.

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About the National Indian Gaming Association (NIGA) - The National Indian Gaming Association is a nonprofit trade association comprised of 184 American Indian Nations and other nonvoting associate member. The mission of NIGA is to advance the lives of Indian people –

economically, socially and politically. NIGA operates as a clearinghouse and educational legislative and public policy resources for tribes, policymakers and the public on Indian gaming issues and tribal community development. For more information, visit www.indiangaming.org.