



# USET

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For Immediate Release

## **An Open Letter to President Trump Regarding Recent Remarks Disparaging Native People**

Dear Mr. President -

On the heels of Thanksgiving and at the conclusion of Native American Heritage Month, a month set aside each year with the purpose of recognizing the significant contributions that America's first peoples have made to the United States, I was saddened, shocked, and appalled by the level of disrespect you displayed during yesterday's honoring of World War II Native American Code Talkers. Your continued use of the name "Pocahontas" in a derogatory manner, and for partisan political gain, is not only an insult and dishonor to her legacy, but an insult to all Native peoples. Furthermore, to honor the sacrifice and bravery of these warriors with a portrait of President Andrew Jackson in the foreground is tone deaf, at best, considering the deplorable and shameful acts that he committed against Native peoples as a General and as President of the United States.

Mr. President, your words yesterday run contrary to those you set forth as part of your recent Native American Heritage Month Proclamation in which you stated the following:

*"American Indians and Alaska Natives are inextricably linked with the history of the United States. Beginning with the Pilgrims' arrival at Plymouth Colony and continuing until the present day, Native American's contributions are woven deeply into our Nation's rich tapestry. During National Native American Heritage Month, we honor and celebrate the first Americans and recognize their contributions and sacrifices. Native Americans have influenced every stage of America's development. They helped early European settlers survive and thrive in a new land. They contributed democratic ideas to our constitutional Framers. And, for more than 200 years, they have bravely answered the call to defend our Nation, serving with distinction in every branch of the United States Armed Forces. The Nation is grateful for the service and sacrifice of all American Indians and Alaska Natives. My Administration is committed to tribal sovereignty and self-determination. A great Nation keeps its word, and this Administration will continue to uphold and defend its responsibilities to American Indians and Alaska Natives. Together, we will strengthen the relationship between the United States Government and Native Americans."*

Mr. President, these proclamation words properly convey the respect and dignity that we deserve, which were unfortunately woefully absent from yesterday's event. They convey an understanding about the role, influence, and sacrifice of Natives towards the growth, development, and prosperity of this country; a country which has ultimately become the strongest, wealthiest, and most influential governing power the world has ever known.

Mr. President, as you stated in your proclamation, not only does a great Nation keep its word, but its exceptionalism is directly attributable to its ability to forge truth and reconciliation with its shameful and immoral acts. It is no secret, however, that our people have been waiting hundreds of years for the United States to keep its word; to look us in the eye as sovereign nations and live up to the agreements forged in the exchange of resources. In doing so, Tribal Nations and the United States will finally be able to move forward with a relationship rooted in diplomacy and mutual respect for each other's inherent sovereign rights and authorities.

Mr. President, as Native Americans, we are most often a marginalized and forgotten people in our own homelands. However, despite a legacy of numerous federal assimilation and termination policies against us, we have persevered against the greatest of odds. We continue to contribute to the story, prosperity, economy, culture, and defense of this great country. And yet, we continue to face the indignity of our stories being told for us in ways that devalue and ignore these contributions, stories which misrepresent America's role in the atrocities committed against our people. It is nothing less than a slap in the face, then, to watch you perpetuate this disparagement at an event meant to "honor" us.

Mr. President, as you stated in your remarks yesterday, Native peoples have been here "long before anyone else". As you also stated during your election victory speech not so long ago, "the forgotten men and women of our country will be forgotten no longer." With both of these sentiments in mind, we deserve much better than what was offered yesterday. Grave injustices have been perpetrated against Native peoples since the beginning of this democratic experiment. It is time for Native Americans to finally receive the honor and respect we rightfully deserve in our own lands.

Mr. President, Tribal Nations stand ready to forge a better tomorrow for all humanity in partnership with the United States. A great Nation does keep its word and the first step toward fulfillment of America's promises is not just words, but action. While yesterday's offensive display was a giant step backward in our relationship, there is still time for you to actually deliver on the sacred promises made to the first peoples of this land. You possess the power and opportunity to create change for the good; the power and opportunity to heal and unify instead of divide. You can choose to do better. You must do better. The moment, though hundreds of years in the making, is now.

Sincerely,  
Kirk Francis  
President of USET SPF/USET  
Chief of the Penobscot Indian Nation

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**United South and Eastern Tribes (USET)**

Established in 1969, the United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc. (USET) is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization representing twenty-seven (27) federally recognized Tribal Nations, from Maine to Florida to Texas. USET is dedicated to enhancing the development of Tribal Nations, and improving the capabilities of Tribal governments, improving the quality of life for Indian people through a variety of technical and supportive programmatic services.

**USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF)**

Established in 2014, the USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) is a non-profit, inter-Tribal organization representing twenty-seven (27) federally recognized Tribal Nations, from Maine to Florida to Texas. USET SPF is dedicated to promoting, protecting, and advancing the inherent sovereign rights and authorities of Tribal Nations and in assisting its membership in dealing effectively with public policy issues.

*Because there is Strength in Unity*