On February 14, 2022, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) convened Tribal Nations across the United States for the 2022 State of Indian Nations (SOIN) Address and its legislative conference, the 2022 Executive Council Winter Session. With a newly condensed and virtual format, tribal delegates were able to hear members of Congress and the Biden-Harris Administration outline their priorities for tackling key challenges facing tribal communities. For the first time in NCAI history, registration to attend the virtual conference was free with the intent of providing an inclusive dialogue for all tribal governments and citizens across Indian Country.

**State of Indian Nations**
The 20th Annual State of Indian Nations (SOIN) began in a good way with a Mohawk thanks-giving address delivered by Alma Ransom, former Tribal Chief of the Saint Regis Mohawk and former NCAI Treasurer. NCAI Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Dante Desiderio (Sappony) then gave opening remarks and welcomed members of Congress, government officials, tribal leaders, citizens, and thousands of others watching from across the nation. NCAI CEO Desiderio also specifically applauded the Native youth in attendance and highlighted this year’s first-ever Youth of Indian Nations address.

In their debut, NCAI Youth Commission Co-Presidents Jessica Lambert (Choctaw Nation and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) and Simon Friday (Organized Village of Kake) gave a powerful speech discussing solutions to the unique challenges Native youth face in their communities. Lambert and Friday highlighted the Youth Commission’s priorities of education, climate change, and mental health, and discussed how the youth can be aided to take charge of these issues for future generations.

NCAI Youth Commission Co-President Jessica Lambert delivered the first-ever Youth of Indian Nations address.

**WATCH SOIN 2022!**
The Youth Commission officers then introduced keynote speaker NCAI President Fawn Sharp (Quinault Indian Nation) to deliver the State of Indian Nations address. President Sharp highlighted the successes of Indian Country that occurred in the past year despite the challenges faced while continuing to navigate a global pandemic. President Sharp shared her vision to raise the bar of advocacy for Native peoples to create a unified force for Tribal Nations and exercise their full spectrum of sovereignty. Within her speech, President Sharp spoke on the importance of federal collaboration in infrastructure development, the inclusion of Indigenous leaders in climate-related negotiations, and the power of the Native vote.

President Sharp’s address was followed by a Congressional Response from U.S. Representative Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin). Impressed by the voices of the youth and echoing the infrastructure-based momentum of the SOIN address, Representative Davids spoke with fierce tenacity about the future of Indian Country and shared her determination to maintain the obligations of Congress to Tribal Nations.

"Every single member of Congress has that obligation to uphold, to be aware of, and be educated on the federal trust responsibility to Tribal Nations." - Rep. Sharice Davids

U.S. Representative Sharice Davids delivering the 2022 State of Indian Nations Congressional Response.

SOIN concluded with a live Q&A segment that produced a dynamic discussion between SOIN speakers, tribal leaders, and those in attendance with a hopeful pursuit for the future of tribal communities.

Executive Council Winter Session
NCAI President Fawn Sharp officially called the 2022 NCAI Executive Council Winter Session General Assembly to order by welcoming NCAI members and guests from across the nation and introducing Governor J. Michael Chavarria (Pueblo of Santa Clara), who delivered the morning’s invocation in his Native language.

Next, NCAI CEO Dante Desiderio recognized the nation-to-nation partnerships formed within the first year of the Biden-Harris Administration and commended their response to meet the needs of tribal citizens through effective policy. CEO Desiderio thanked Indian Country for its hard work to advance tribal sovereignty.
in all areas, reiterating NCAI’s commitment to being dependable partners that build upon every individual success. Desiderio concluded his remarks by emphasizing NCAI’s approach to becoming a more responsive and inclusive organization for all Tribal Nations pursuing the common goal of self-determination.

President Sharp then gave a heartfelt and emotional introduction as she welcomed the first-ever Native American Cabinet Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) Secretary Deb Haaland (Pueblo of Laguna). Secretary Haaland then provided an Interior update and highlighted accomplishments that represented decades of advocacy and work relating to the protection of sacred places, climate change, and native language preservation. Secretary Haaland expressed gratitude to NCAI for fierce engagement in policy development and announced the opening of nominations for tribal representatives to serve on the Secretary’s Tribal Advisory Committee (STAC).

In recognition of their distinguished service to Indian Country, NCAI’s 23rd Annual Leadership Awards honorees were also celebrated throughout the conference. Shannon Holsey, President of the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians, was given the NCAI Native American Leadership Award in appreciation of her instrumental role in strengthening NCAI and remarkable commitment to improving policies for Tribal Nations.

Governor Stephen Roe Lewis (Gila River Indian Community) then addressed the General Assembly for the first time serving in his new role as NCAI Recording Secretary. Governor Lewis welcomed U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Attorney General Merrick Garland for a panel discussion on public safety in Indian Country. Attorney General Garland affirmed the DOJ’s commitment to honoring nation-to-nation relationships and announced plans to host a formal Tribal Nations Leadership Council meeting this Spring. Before participating in a Q&A session with tribal leaders, Attorney General Garland commended NCAI for its work in advocating for the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), reaffirmed the Department’s stance as a proponent of its historic tribal provisions, and encouraged Congress to pass the bill into law. Governor Lewis then welcomed Bryan Newland, U.S. Department of the Interior Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs and citizen of the Bay Mills Indian Community. Newland provided an update on the Interior’s Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative and

“We cannot achieve our joint goal of reducing violence in tribal areas without mutual respect on our side for the concerns of the tribal governments.” - Attorney General Garland
announced a series of reforms to the Office of Justice Services Correctional Program to protect the rights, dignity, and safety of tribal citizens in custody.

After a short break, NCAI 1st Vice President Mark Macarro (Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians) introduced Michael Connor (Pueblo of Taos), Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. Assistant Secretary Connor discussed Indian Country’s involvement in the Army’s Civil Works Program and his intent to prioritize the needs of Tribal Nations as it relates to the design and implementation of new projects. Connor then participated in a live Q&A session with tribal leaders in the audience.

Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, joined ECWS to share her determination to work for a brighter, fairer future for Indian Country as an ally on Capitol Hill. Pelosi addressed the longstanding economic inequities faced by tribal communities, as well as Congress’ fundamental duty to provide proper funding far beyond post-pandemic recovery as it pertains to infrastructure, climate, and broadband. Before closing, Speaker Pelosi urged the Senate to end the scourge of violence against Native women by following suit with the House’s passage of VAWA legislation last year.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer then delivered remarks on his goal as Majority Leader to provide resources that ensure tribal communities have the opportunity to be successful. Senator Schumer pointed to the bipartisan infrastructure bill that secured a historic $13 billion for Tribal Nations and the importance of strengthening jurisdictional corrections in VAWA to protect Native women. Stacy Bohlen, Chief Executive Officer of the National Indian Health Board and citizen of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, gave an update on the issues facing the Indian Health Service (IHS). Bohlen called on allies across Indian Country to organize a consolidated push to call on Congress for Advanced Appropriations for IHS.

Next, NCAI President Fawn Sharp presented U.S. House Representative Raúl Grijalva (AZ) with the NCAI Congressional Leadership Award. Rep. Grijalva was chosen to receive this award in appreciation of his steadfast support of tribal sovereignty and for spearheading of several major pieces of legislation to protect tribal lands.

NCAI Treasurer Shannon Holsey introduced U.S. Representatives Gwen Moore (WI) and Don Young (AK) for a Congressional

“I promise to fight for you, stand shoulder to shoulder with you, to listen and to work with all of you to secure a better future for ourselves and our children.” - U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer
fireside chat. During their discussion, Representative Young emphasized the importance of all Native peoples standing together to advocate for tribal priorities with a united front. Representative Moore followed by addressing discriminatory economic federal policies and her determination to make those policies more inclusive for Tribal Nations. Both Representatives expressed their work and support of the historic VAWA legislation in their closing remarks.

Senate Committee on Indian Affairs leadership Senator Brian Schatz (HI) and Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK) joined to discuss the importance of protecting and expanding voting rights and support for the bipartisan VAWA legislation that includes a tribal title to strengthen and further restore tribal jurisdiction. In his closing remarks, Senator Schatz thanked NCAI for its leading role in advocating for tribal priorities and being a key partner for the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

To continue the conversation on the day’s most pressing topic, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), a panel discussion was held to provide an executive summary and overview on the tribal title included in the legislation. U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs’ Jennifer Romero, Majority Staff Director & Chief Counsel, and Amber Ebarb, Minority Deputy Staff Director, joined a panel alongside Jessica Jensen, Chief Counsel of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, NCAI President Sharp, and NCAI Treasurer Shannon Holsey. President Holsey elevated Indian Country’s guidance and input concerning VAWA, and staff thanked advocates, stakeholders, and victims for helping to push the legislation forward.

To conclude the evening, Frank Ettawageshik (Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians), Executive Director of the United Tribes of Michigan, was honored with the NCAI Special Recognition Award. NCAI recognized Mr. Ettawageshik in appreciation of his tireless advocacy to advance tribal sovereignty and self-governance at the tribal, regional, state, national, and international levels.
FUTURE DATES

2022 Mid Year Conference
June 12, 2022 – June 16, 2022
Dena’ina Civic & Convention Center
Anchorage, AK

79th Annual Convention
October 30, 2022 – November 4, 2022
SAFE Credit Union Convention Center
Sacramento, CA

THE LATEST NEWS & UPDATES
FOR INDIAN COUNTRY.

By signing up for NCAI newsletters, stay up-to-date on the latest news, legislation, and events benefiting tribal governments and communities. See our work in action!

JOIN OUR MAILING LIST