



## NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

March 8, 2019

### RE: NCAI President's Report to Membership

Dear NCAI Tribal Members,

First, thank you for your membership and support of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). I was pleased to see many of you at the Executive Council Winter Session last month. NCAI enters its 76th year of advocacy on behalf of Indian Country at a critical time, and we had a series of productive discussions with federal policymakers and among tribal leaders. I delivered a "President's Report" with an update on the review of NCAI's workplace that has been underway since last fall and committed to providing a more detailed update on steps we have taken in this area.

NCAI is working hard to address the concerns raised about NCAI's workplace. We deeply value our employees and the service they provide on behalf of Indian Country. The following is a summary of the concrete steps and actions we have taken to address the work environment concerns.

**Ad Hoc Committee:** In my letter to NCAI members dated October 11, 2018, I shared that the Executive Committee had established an Ad Hoc Committee to review the allegations of misconduct and understand how they were raised and addressed. At the Annual Convention, I shared that the Ad Hoc Committee's mandate was broadened, and the Executive Committee authorized the hiring of external legal support to help complete the Ad Hoc Committee's work. Following the Annual Convention, the Executive Committee retained Quarles & Brady LLP to conduct an independent review into past concerns raised by employees and how they were handled, as well as a review of NCAI's policies, procedures, and organizational structure.

The results of that review were presented to the Ad Hoc Committee on February 10, 2019, in a nearly three-hour session where the Ad Hoc Committee thoroughly demonstrated that a vigorous analysis had been performed. The review did identify several areas where NCAI's policies, practices, and procedures should be strengthened, particularly in the areas of human resources and communications between the Executive Committee and management. As we move forward, we are committed to reinforcing a culture of respect and ensuring our employees are supported and feel that they can come forward with any concern.

NCAI has undertaken the following steps designed to strengthen NCAI's workplace:

#### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**PRESIDENT**  
**Jefferson Keel**  
*Chickasaw Nation*

**FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT**  
**Aaron Payment**  
*Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Michigan*

**RECORDING SECRETARY**  
**Juana Majel-Dixon**  
*Pauma Band Mission Indians*

**TREASURER**  
**W. Ron Allen**  
*Jamestown S'Kallam Tribe*

#### REGIONAL VICE-PRESIDENTS

**ALASKA**  
**Rob Sanderson, Jr.**  
*Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska*

**EASTERN OKLAHOMA**  
**Joe Byrd**  
*Cherokee Nation*

**GREAT PLAINS**  
**Larry Wright, Jr.**  
*Ponca Tribe of Nebraska*

**MIDWEST**  
**Shannon Holsey**  
*Stockbridge Munsee Band of Mohicans*

**NORTHEAST**  
**Lance Gumbs**  
*Shinnecock Indian Nation*

**NORTHWEST**  
**Leonard Forsman**  
*Suquamish Tribe*

**PACIFIC**  
**Brian Poncho**  
*Bishop Paiute Tribe*

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN**  
**VACANT**

**SOUTHEAST**  
**Nancy Carnley**  
*Ma-Chis Lower Creek Indians*

**SOUTHERN PLAINS**  
**Zach Pahmahmie**  
*Prairie Band of Potawatomi Nation*

**SOUTHWEST**  
**Joe Garcia**  
*Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo*

**WESTERN**  
**Quintin C. Lopez**  
*Tohono O'odham Nation*

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**  
**Jacqueline Pata**  
*Tlingit*

#### NCAI HEADQUARTERS

1516 P Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20005  
202.466.7767  
202.466.7797 fax  
[www.ncai.org](http://www.ncai.org)

- **Addressing HR capacity and review of HR processes:** NCAI engaged an external HR professional last fall to ensure that NCAI staff had an avenue outside of the NCAI's organizational structure to report any incidents of harassment or raise other concerns while the Ad Hoc Committee conducted its review. The HR consultant was tasked with reviewing NCAI's HR processes and record-keeping systems. This review is complete and NCAI has begun implementing the recommendations.
- **Strengthening NCAI's operational capacity:** NCAI hired a new Deputy Director, Ahniwake Rose, who started in December. Her primary responsibilities are to provide operational and administrative leadership across NCAI, including overseeing NCAI's human resources functions.
- **External review of NCAI's Employee Policies and HR processes:** NCAI also engaged an outside employment attorney to review NCAI's employee and workplace policies. This review is complete, and the Executive Committee will meet soon to consider the recommended policy updates.
- **Workplace culture audit:** NCAI hired an outside firm to conduct an audit of NCAI's workplace culture, which included confidential interviews with current and former staff and other stakeholders, to get a better sense of the current work climate at NCAI. This audit found that there is *not* a culture of sexually inappropriate behavior at NCAI and found no threat to the safety of our staff. Staff appeared to be very candid during these interviews, but no new allegations of sexually inappropriate conduct were reported beyond those that were already known to the Ad Hoc Committee.

It is critical to note that the allegations regarding sexually inappropriate behavior were against *former* employees and the most recent was alleged to have occurred in 2016. In other words, the audit found no current employee had been accused of sexually inappropriate behavior. While there were many rumors, this outside firm found no facts to support the rumors. The firm did find that some employees were apprehensive about bringing forward concerns. We are working hard to fix this, including ensuring that we create an environment of support for coming forward early with concerns so they can be responsibly addressed.

- **External review of NCAI's complaints process:** NCAI hired an external expert to review its policies and procedures for handling complaints and has begun implementing updates as recommended.
- **Organization-wide trainings on harassment and complaint policies:** NCAI instituted annual trainings at all levels of the organization on NCAI's harassment and complaint policies and the specific responsibilities of staff, supervisors, and executive committee members under those policies.

- **Supervisory training:** NCAI required all supervisors to attend a day-long supervisory training.

Finally, we are embarking on a search for our first Chief Executive Officer (CEO). NCAI's Jackie Pata recently submitted her resignation as Executive Director. Jackie is the longest-serving Executive Director of NCAI and has been instrumental in bringing NCAI to where we are today. Under her tenure, Jackie raised the profile of NCAI and Indian Country through efforts like Native Vote, creation of the Policy Research Center, and securing the first ever Embassy of Tribal Nations in Washington, D.C. Jackie and the Executive Committee are committed to a smooth transition, which we have agreed will take place by mid-May.

In the meantime, we urge you to send us recommendations from Indian Country for our first CEO. This change in title speaks to the growth of the organization and our dedication to improvement. We are committed to finding the right leader to guide the organization in the important work we have before us and we realize that in this rapidly changing, modern era, NCAI needs to keep pace to serve tribal nations effectively.

The Executive Committee will convene for an in-person retreat in the weeks to come where we will prepare for the transition to new executive leadership and address several priorities identified during the Ad Hoc Committee's review.

Thank you again for your patience as we do the work necessary to move NCAI forward in the best way possible. We value your membership. NCAI is only as strong as the many tribal nations that participate in our process and help carry our collective mission forward. Please be assured that NCAI's work continues unabated as we advocate strongly on behalf of our members and Indian Country.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jefferson Keel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.