



U.S. President Donald J. Trump gave his State of the Union address to Congress on Feb. 5, an annual message meant to lay out a legislative agenda and course for the country.

Similarly, every year the president of the National Congress of American Indians gives a State of Indian Nations address, not only to inform the U.S. Congress and other officials, but tribal leaders and tribal members.

NCAI President Jefferson Keel delivered the speech Feb. 11. The address is scheduled to land near to that of the U.S. president's.

"On behalf of the 573 federally recognized tribal nations, dozens of state-recognized tribal nations, and millions of Native people across this land ... I proudly proclaim the State of Indian Nations is strong, and we grow stronger every day," Keel said.

Keel is the 22nd president of NCAI. He was elected in Oct. 2017 to serve his third nonconsecutive term.



Keel

"From our cultures and languages to our economies and political power, tribal nations are crafting a great resurgence that is forging brighter futures for our communities and generations yet to come," Keel said.

However, Keel also spoke of "strong headwinds and resistance," and listed off several challenges for Indian Country, many of which he laid at the feet of the federal government and particularly the Trump Administration.

Keel mentioned the recent court challenge to the Indian Child Welfare Act and the recent federal government shutdown that disproportionately affected Native Americans. Other concerns were climate change effects, and the Trump Administration's "effort to undercut" the regulatory framework by which tribal nations place land into trust.

He had harsh words for the Department of the Interior and said it cannot, "be allowed to simply make it up as it goes along" when deciding whether to take land into trust for tribal nations. Keel said a rushed and ill-conceived reorganization of the Interior and the Bureau of Indian Affairs was equally concerning.

"We also demand [the] Interior heed the call of Indian Country and Congress by creating an Under Secretary for Indian Affairs, so that our priorities can get their just due," he said.

Keel spoke at great length about positives across Indian Country, too. He said its resurgence could be seen in areas as diverse as sports and the arts.

Close to home, he lauded Joy Prescott, a fourth-grade math teacher at Pemayetv Emahakv Charter School on the Brighton Reservation, who was recently named Florida's Teacher of the Year.

Keel highlighted the election of the first two Native American U.S. Congresswomen - Deb Haaland of New Mexico and Sharice Davids of Kansas.

"Our resurgence is seen in the record number of Native candidates who ran for federal, state, and local office - and won," he said.

Keel ended his address by listing off several initiatives he wants to see addressed by the U.S. government. They include, in part:

- Strengthening the Violence Against Women Act.
- Passing Savanna's Act and including tribal nations in Victims of Crime Act funding.
- Ending an assault on Indian Country's unique political status.
- Investing substantially in tribal infrastructure.
- Passing the Indian Community Economic Enhancement Act and Native American Business Incubators Act.
- Properly implementing the Farm Bill and 477 workforce development law.
- Combating the growing number of hate crimes against Native people.
- Ensuring a complete count of Native people in Census 2020.
- Repairing the "Broken Promises" reported by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.
- Committing to appointing federal judges who understand and respect the unique political and legal status of tribal nations.
- Confirming a permanent Indian Health Service director.
- Ensuring the Interior Secretary upholds tribal sovereignty.

"Casual observers of Indian Country's resurgence may deem it an overnight phenomenon," Keel said. "Nothing could be further from the truth. Our success flows from the foresight and counsel of our ancestors. It is driven by the core values and relentless spirit that have sustained our societies and cultures for millennia."

The NCAI was founded in 1944. For more information and to read a transcript of Keel's address, go to [ncai.org](https://www.ncai.org), and click on "State of Indian Nations."

Please follow and like us:

