



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

Testimony of the National Congress of American Indians on the Completion of the National Museum of the American Indian Senate Committee on Indian Affairs March 3, 2004

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Gunacheesh. Good morning Chairman Campbell, Vice Chairman Inouye, and distinguished Committee Members. My name is Jacqueline Johnson, and I serve as the Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and its more than 250 member tribal nations, I am pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony on the completion of the National Museum of the American Indian. Thank you for affording me the opportunity to represent our member nations and express our tremendous excitement as the Museum nears completion.

As the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments, NCAI is very proud to be able to work with the Museum on this historical event that will impact not only Indian Country, but the public at large who will be afforded the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the rich cultural fabric of this nation's native people through the NMAI's exhibits and programs. We offer our deepest thanks to this Committee for its instrumental role in bringing this important effort to fruition.

NCAI has had the honor of working closely with the staff of the Museum. The member tribes of NCAI and the NCAI Executive Board are very excited about the opportunity the Museum will present to broaden public understanding of the influence American Indian and Alaska Native cultures have on our nation as a whole, and the continuum of cultures that continue to thrive in contemporary Native America.

NCAI is looking forward to the week of the opening, and we have worked in conjunction with the staff of the NMAI to do consultation and outreach to all tribal governments. NCAI has hosted open working sessions during our Annual and Executive Council meetings to ensure that tribes are informed about the activities planned and are able to provide their ideas and input. We plan to hold another informational session at our Mid-Year meeting this June in Uncasville, Connecticut at the Mohegan Sun facilities. NCAI has met with the NMAI staff throughout the past 2 years to provide input in the planning process for the opening events, and sits on the Steering Committee that is supervising all of the activities being planned for this momentous occasion.

In advance of the grand opening, NCAI will be hosting several educational forums at the National Press Club and other venues in Washington, DC to raise the awareness of the general public about the contributions American Indians and Alaska Natives have made to this country, as well as to educate the public on the issues facing tribes today. Specifically, the first forum will focus on our past history and our contributions to this country and the second forum will discuss our contemporary issues and our identity as tribal governments in this country. We feel it is important for the general public to see the reality of tribal nations as the thriving governments and successful communities with flourishing cultures and traditions--not just in the light of romanticized notions of Indians from movies or books. NCAI has also been advising the National Geographic as they prepare a special edition of their publication in anticipation of the opening of the Museum. NCAI supports the opening of the Museum and their efforts to celebrate the vibrancy and longevity of over 560 distinct and beautiful native cultures as well as the Museum's intentions to dispel the stereotypical images of a single pan- Native culture.

During the week of the Grand Opening, NCAI and the American Indian Society will be hosting a cultural exchange for all of the tribal groups that will be in town. This cultural exchange will include sharing of tribal dances, songs, and other traditions by native people. NCAI is working to get the word out about NMAI opening events to ensure that all tribes have the opportunity to celebrate this historic opening. Since there are so many requests from groups wanting to do events around this country, NCAI is requesting that organizations and groups notify us of the planned activity so we may add it to our national calendar and prevent overlapping of activities when possible.

In addition, NCAI will host several forums and briefings on Capitol Hill related to the legislative priorities of Indian Country. NCAI requests that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs works with us on the planning of these forums and briefings to ensure that the Native voice will be heard on the Hill during that week.

NCAI would like to once again express its support for the National Museum of the American Indian, and thank the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs for holding this oversight hearing and for its extraordinary efforts to pave the way for this historic recognition of the American Indian and Alaska Native tribes of this nation.