



A Message from United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc & United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund  
President, Penobscot Indian Nation Chief Kirk E. Francis, Sr.

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Ever since President George H.W. Bush signed the first resolution in 1990, America has set aside the month of November to recognize and celebrate the beauty, richness, diversity, and uniqueness of our collective Native American heritage that is interwoven into the foundation and fabric of America. America's first peoples, America's indigenous peoples, have made significant contributions to the prosperity and success of America, beginning with the Haudenosaunee Six Nations model of a participatory democracy to the billions of dollars in economic activity and hundreds of thousands of jobs that Tribal Nation business enterprises contribute today to America's overall economy.

The reality is that such a month exists because we are largely invisible within our own lands. Further, our existence as domestic sovereigns is unknown to most, the truth about our long, complex, and complicated nation to nation relationship is most often untold, and our existence is too often stereotyped, romanticized, and minimalized to a mere historical footnote. The time has come for greater truth about our shared story with America.

As a reflection of our truth and reality, Indian Country is facing several challenges today. Ironically, while we celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passage of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) this year, legislation enacted with the specific purpose of protecting our children, the federal district court for the Northern District of Texas recently ruled that ICWA is unconstitutional on several grounds, including that it violates equal protection requirements of the United States constitution. While this is concerning in and of itself, we are also experiencing constitutionality challenges across all three branches of the federal government, in addition to other challenges that interfere with the free exercise of our inherent sovereign authorities and rights.

While the real challenges must be highlighted and addressed, we must also use these moments to highlight our successes, perseverance, and strength. We have a lot to accomplish ahead of us, but I recognize that there is also much to be grateful and appreciative for during this season of giving thanks; including Native American Heritage Month that offers an opportunity for Indian Country to achieve greater visibility, visibility that will allow us to inch forward to the reality of our vision.

Ultimately, it is incumbent upon us all to be steadfast in our determination to achieve a new reality; rooted in truth, rooted in exertion of our sovereign authorities and rights, rooted in holding America accountable for honoring and fulfilling its promises, and rooted in our cultural values and principles that reflect our special place and understanding of these sacred lands. Indian Country must use these moments to speak our truth and move beyond the comfortable conversations. We must utilize these moments to promote movement beyond a single month that recognizes and celebrates us to a reality where truth, honor, respect, and fulfillment of trust and treaty promises become America's first priority and obligation.

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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.