



A Message from United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc (USET) & the USET Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) President, Penobscot Indian Nation Chief Kirk E. Francis, Sr. on the current crisis of diminishing civility, compassion, and decency unfolding in the United States

A crisis is unfolding in this country and it is one that jeopardizes the principles on which the United States was founded. In our founding documents, we profess our truths to be self-evident, and that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” However, the constant deluge of disheartening news headlines should cause a reasonable person to question whether we, as a nation, are holding ourselves accountable to these truths.

The recent separation of children from their parents resulting from a change in immigration policy, a federal action that Indian Country is far too familiar with, is particularly troubling. It is hard to imagine that anyone would lack the empathy and compassion to understand the pain and anguish that both the children and parents must be experiencing. I recognize that there are varying opinions on how to address our current immigration situation, but it is unacceptable to allow people to suffer needlessly and to be used for political gain. The resulting pain and suffering, and likely long-term trauma, should have been anticipated and understood, which makes this deliberate and intentional act even more appalling.

Indian Country is particularly sensitive to headlines such as these. Indian Country has a long, complicated, and often conflicted relationship with the United States. We are viewing today’s headlines through different lenses, including genocide and intergenerational trauma. We are saddened as we are reminded of the many injustices that we experienced, together with this nation’s lack of accountability for its moral failings. As the indigenous peoples and sovereign nations that pre-date the United States, we know far too well the limits of these founding self-evident truths.

In fact, the challenges that we had to overcome, and still work to overcome, are the direct result of numerous federal policies and laws that sought to assimilate and terminate -- to destroy not only our cultures and traditions, but our existence. While one might assume that these policies and laws are from a bygone era, the truth is that we are only one generation removed from the horrors and atrocities that were committed.

Disrespect and disregard towards Indian Country continues today. Within the past several weeks, during a commencement speech to the 2018 graduating class of the U.S. Naval Academy, President Trump stated, “Together there is nothing Americans can’t do, absolutely nothing. In recent years, and even decades, too many people have forgotten that truth. They’ve forgotten that our ancestors trounced an empire, tamed a

continent, and triumphed over the worst evils in history...America is the greatest fighting force for peace, justice and freedom in the history of the world...We are not going to apologize for America.”

These words reveal a dismissal and avoidance of the truth and facts about Tribal Nation-U.S. history which run counter to many of these words and for which America should be ashamed. More recently, despite repeated requests from Indian Country to stop his derogatory use of the name Pocahontas, President Trump once again used the name as an intentional slur during a June 2018 campaign stop in Nevada ([Read President Francis' November 28th Statement here](#)). These two recent examples serve as present-day reminders that there continues to be a need for greater understanding, education, awareness, truth, and respect.

So when is enough, enough? I fear that too many are becoming desensitized and are normalizing these events and actions that we know in our hearts run counter to our childhood teachings of right versus wrong. The political discourse in this country has moved beyond political differences of opinion and is unlike any we have seen in recent history. It has exposed a truth about who we are; that there are fundamentally different views across this country about human dignity and respect, morals, values, ethics, and justice which serve to weaken us as a society. The sad truth is that America is suffering, and she has lost her way. If we continue down the current path, the damage caused by the deconstruction of our founding principles, and the values that we profess to be the basis of our exceptionalism, may be too insurmountable to overcome.

However, we have the power to do better as a collective society should we choose not to normalize discord; should we choose common decency over politics; should we find the courage to lead with empathy, compassion, and love; should we find the strength to exemplify our convictions in our daily lives; should we recognize the greater law of universal justice and righteousness; and should we decide to recognize that we are all children of the Creator and that we are all related.

As the United States prepares to celebrate its establishment and its declaration of independence, let us remember our indigenous relations who suffered in the name of progress and manifest destiny. Let us remember the many who made the ultimate sacrifice as a reflection of their deep regard for the aspirational principles set forth in this country's founding documents. Let us reawaken to the truth that we share a common responsibility to one another, that division is diametrically opposite to the vision of America's founding ideals and aspirations, and that there is exponentially more good that comes from unity.

Let us use this time to remind ourselves of our common bonds, to reverse the current crisis that we are experiencing, and to begin the process of healing and reconciliation. Should we choose to do so, America will be stronger, its actions will once again reflect its professed self-evident truths, it will lead by example, and it will once again be the beacon of light, possibilities, and opportunities that the world aspires to emulate.

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.

Because there is Strength in Unity