

Greetings, Mr. Rain Bear Stands Last, Executive Director of Global Indigenous Council, Blackfeet Nation Chairman Timothy Davis, and Tribunal members:

I send my deepest apologies for not being able to join you in person, and am writing to convey to you my appreciation for the gravity of the issues your Tribunal is addressing.

Women and children are the lifeline of our cultures; without women we won't survive. One hundred years after the right to vote was established for women, we still see gross inequity and violence towards women, especially in Indian Country. Indigenous women are impacted by the issues that challenge all American women, but disproportionately so. From health care to a safe working and living environment, to equal opportunities in education and commerce, to domestic violence and sexual assault.

Tragically, native women suffer from violent and sexual crimes at higher rates than non-native women. In addition to this horrific reality, the number of catalogued MMIWG is lower due to underreporting and inadequate data collection. As a country, we must prioritize policies that protect and advance women. We must believe them when they are assaulted, and investigate when they go missing. For those reasons, I support the current legislation in Congress, the Justice for Native Survivors of Sexual Violence Act and the Native Youth and Tribal Officer Protection Act, and I urge the Senate to act on passage.

Policy that affects Native American communities must be shaped -- from start to finish -- by tribal leaders who remain on the front lines of critical issues. That is why I stand by the tireless work done by the tribal alliance of the Global Indigenous Council, the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council, and the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association. The tribal alliance has boldly forged a path to positive legislative change on Capitol Hill, which crucially includes passing widely supported bipartisan amendments that make Savanna's Act more effective.

What happens in Washington affects the air we breathe, the water we drink, and tribal lands; but too often indigenous issues remain unheard because of systemic racism and underinvestments in Indian Country by the federal government.

I have put forward bold solutions to the structural failures that have allowed big corporations to purchase our democracy, including instituting congressional term limits, making it easier for Americans to vote, and creating a national referendum process to directly engage voters on key issues. As part of that plan, the Native American Voting Rights Act has -- and always will have -- my full support.

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