

Justice for Indigenous Communities

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The third anniversary of Indigenous Peoples' Day in Wisconsin is an opportunity to celebrate and commit to the preservation of Indigenous American cultures.

BRUNSWICK, WI - In 2019 Governor Tony Evers declared the second Monday of October to be commemorated as Indigenous Peoples' Day in Wisconsin. On the third anniversary of this day, we should reflect on all we owe to the Indigenous communities that contribute so much to the state of Wisconsin.

Since the arrival of European settlers, American culture has portrayed Native individuals in derogatory ways. Despite many historic and modern-day challenges that Native Americans have faced, Indigenous communities have endured.

Indigenous Peoples' Day is an opportunity for all Wisconsinites to recognize the rich ancestral history and cultural impact of First Nations peoples in our state, a history that so often goes unappreciated. Just as important, this day allows us time to contemplate our nation's history when it comes to interactions between the United States government and sovereign tribal communities.



One challenge facing Indigenous communities is language loss. The United Nations estimates that a language dies every two weeks, most of them Indigenous languages. Native American languages were critical for our Native American code talkers for the military in WWI and WWII. These languages must be preserved as a testament to our diverse and rich culture.

In Wisconsin, our communities are taking action to prevent this loss. Last year, Ho-Chunk tribal officials partnered with the Wisconsin Library System to establish a collection of materials, including written, audio and visual materials, detailing the Ho-Chunk language.

Tribes are using language classes and even immersion programs to educate young tribal members in their ancestral languages. With resources like these, Native communities can educate new generations of speakers and ensure the survival of an important element of their cultural heritage.

While serving in the State Assembly I was proud to pass legislation to stop the dehumanizing practice of using caricatures of Indigenous people as mascots. In the intervening years, many schools have stopped using these mascots, but according to the Wisconsin Indian Education Association, some of these names remain in use in our schools. It's past time for school districts to do the right thing and end the practice for good.

The number of Indigenous students in the UW system has fallen precipitously in the last decade. In response, I sponsored a bill to allow any member of a federally-recognized tribe in

the United States to receive in-state tuition within the University of Wisconsin System. Drawing in Native students from across the nation strengthens the UW system, improves outcomes for Native communities across the country and attracts young professionals who can build a brighter future for our state.



I was honored to serve on the Wisconsin Department of Justice's Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Task Force. I'm excited to see what recommendations are put forward in the final report this winter.

I look forward to partnering with tribal leaders and communities to continue this important work across our state and nation. We celebrate Indigenous Peoples' day this week, but the work of honoring and preserving our Native communities is ongoing.

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