

# Native American Policy

February 27, 2020

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Native Americans are at the heart of America's story. This story cannot be told without acknowledging the devastation and [genocide](#) perpetrated on Native Americans by our government. But we must also recognize that the framers of the Constitution [found inspiration](#) in the representative democracy of the Iroquois nation, and that the very fabric of our society is informed — and strengthened — by the contributions of Native Americans.

Today, the United States government has a nation-to-nation relationship with each of the country's [574](#) Native American Tribes. The foundational understanding of this relationship is that the United States upholds and supports Tribal sovereignty by protecting and securing Native Americans' legal rights. Yet despite this relationship, Native communities have suffered disparities in healthcare, economic and educational opportunities, crime and violence, environmental health, and countless other issues for generations. Because of discriminatory policies and government-sanctioned exploitation, many Native people are trapped in a cycle of [underemployment](#), [lower life expectancy](#) and [intergenerational poverty](#). Our government must honor and uphold our promise to support Tribal sovereignty and work collaboratively with Tribal governments to ensure the well-being, prosperity, and safety of all Native Americans.

A Steyer administration will celebrate the rich history of Indigenous communities, while acknowledging and atoning for past and continued atrocities against Native peoples. Tom will protect the well-being of the Indigenous people in our country and work to eliminate inequality and discriminatory practices impacting Native American communities. As President, Tom will fight for climate and environmental justice and correct for disparities in wages, criminal justice, healthcare, infrastructure, and housing, among other things.

## Tribal Sovereignty

In a Steyer Administration, policies affecting Native Americans will be shaped directly by Native American leaders who continue to be on the front lines of critical issues. Tom will ensure Native communities' rights to self determination, uphold treaty rights and Tribal sovereignty, and strengthen the government-to-government consultation process. Tom will also reinvigorate the White House Council on Indigenous Communities and the White House Tribal Nations Conference, and prioritize the establishment of Tribal advisory

committees in many federal agencies. Under a Steyer administration, the United States will commit to the UN Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples and hold accountable foreign governments that violate these rights.

## Climate and Environmental Justice

[Native American communities](#) are among those most harmed by the climate crisis — and as a direct result, Native people suffer from environmental health issues, economic instability, and a profound impact on culture and tradition. A Steyer administration will take substantial steps to restore the health of our planet and protect Native communities from the worst impacts of climate change. Tom will reverse the Trump administration's erosion of environmental protections and, together with Tribal leaders, develop stronger standards and protections for the future of our planet and all Tribal and public lands in America. To address climate and environmental impacts on Tribal lands and to transition rapidly toward a clean energy economy, Tom will:

- **Address long-standing environmental justice challenges** by protecting streams, rivers, and natural areas. Tom will fully fund the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, mobilize \$75 billion for Superfund site cleanup and brownfield remediation, and direct the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to exercise strong enforcement oversight of corporate polluters under the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. He will also roll back permits for Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines and create an Environmental Justice Division in the Department of Justice. Tom will also fully fund Tribal environmental programs under the EPA and provide for Tribal regulatory authority on Tribal lands.
- **Build a clean energy economy and create millions of jobs.** Tom will work with communities to invest \$250 billion in locally-determined clean energy and climate justice projects through the Civilian Climate Corps that will leverage the private sector and provide technical assistance, jobs, and training opportunities throughout America, including on Tribal lands. Tom's plan will invest \$2 trillion and mobilize an additional \$5 trillion for grid modernization, climate disaster resilience, clean water, food sovereignty, and other climate smart infrastructure.

## Economic Justice

For decades the unemployment rate for Native Americans [has been among the highest](#) in the nation. To reinvest in Native American communities and break the corporate stranglehold on our government, Tom will:

- **Fund a multi-year effort to rebuild America's infrastructure** that will expand business opportunities, create good paying jobs, and lead us to a renewable future in partnership with all Native American communities.

- **Expand funding for [Community Development Financial Institutions on Tribal lands](#)** to promote financial education, reduce predatory lending, and foster entrepreneurship. Tom will also expand funding from the [Community Reinvestment Act](#).
- **Protect Social Security** so that Native American seniors can retire with dignity.

## Criminal Justice Reform

Native Americans face increasing rates of mass incarceration because our criminal justice is overly punitive and racially biased. Compared with their white counterparts Native American men are [four times more likely](#) and Native American women [are six times more likely](#) to end up in prison. Native Americans face more violence on average and are the [most likely to be killed by police](#). Native people are also subject to [harsher federal sentences](#) as compared to the same crimes under state law. Tom's [criminal justice plan](#) will reduce mass incarceration by reforming sentencing, eliminating cash bail and private prisons, reducing police brutality, and supporting rehabilitation. Building on his plan to reform and restore justice, Tom will:

- **Consult with Native Americans as sovereign nations** and work with them collaboratively to improve law enforcement agencies and crime reduction.
- **Increase funding for Tribal law enforcement programs**, so that the necessary staffing, facilities, and equipment are in place to combat the waves of crime against Native Americans.
- **Increase funding to strengthen the Department of Justice's programs for Tribal lands**, to bring critical services for victims of crime and violence.
- **Streamline complex and overlapping law enforcement systems** to ensure we aren't enforcing the same crimes more severely for Native Americans.
- **End the federal ban and incarceration for marijuana use**, and allow Native American communities to grow cannabis and invest in the legal market.

## Violence Against Women and Gun Violence

The shocking rates of abuse and violence in Native American communities cannot be allowed to continue. Over [83](#) percent of Native Americans have been victims of violence. Native women are more likely than other racial groups to [experience domestic violence](#) and [sexual assault](#). And, non-Natives are responsible for [two thirds of sexual assaults](#) committed against Native women. These consistently high rates of violence have led to an epidemic of [missing and murdered women](#) and [trafficking](#), and the issue is seriously [underreported](#) in federal data. To combat this troubling epidemic, Tom will:

### To do so, I will:

- **Reauthorize and fully fund the [Violence Against Women Act \(VAWA\)](#)** and support VAWA's amendments that allow Tribal courts to prosecute non-Natives that commit domestic abuse against Native women.
- **Tackle gun violence** by treating it as the public health crisis that it is. A Steyer administration will establish a national assault weapon registry, require a license for all gun ownership, and classify violent White supremacists as domestic terrorists, create a new Office of Gun Violence Prevention to coordinate efforts across law enforcement agencies, and invest in wraparound services for gun violence survivors.

## Health Care

[Health disparities](#) between Native American communities and the general US population are stark. It is unacceptable that life expectancy for a Native American is [5.5](#) years shorter than the national average. To improve healthcare quality and access for Native Americans, Tom will:

- **Build on the Affordable Care Act**, keep its landmark protections, create a strong public option, and break the insurance and drug companies' corporate stranglehold on the healthcare system.
- **Fully fund the Indian Health Service at the Department of Health and Human Services and invest \$100 billion over a decade in mental health care** in partnership with Native communities, federal agencies, public schools, and providers.
- **Address the opioid crisis with \$75 billion** for treatment programs and enforcement against the illegal distribution and sale of opioids.
- **Require medical providers to complete cultural competency training** to address cultural discrepancies in care delivery.

## Education

Tom's administration will work to reinvigorate our school systems in Native American communities by investing resources to close the achievement gap, improve school facilities, increase teacher pay and professional development, and ensure equal access to educational opportunities and workforce development. To ensure that Native Americans have access to a quality education, Tom's administration will:

- **Fully fund the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIE)** to support Tribal Education Department grants and other important programs.

- **Coordinate with BIE and Native American communities** to facilitate education on Tribal lands while being mindful of the government-to-government consultation relationship with each tribe and village.
- **Increase funding and scholarships for Tribal colleges and universities (TCUs).**
- **Fully fund the Department of Education's Office of Indian Education** to help all Native American children participate in enrichment programs at school and help teachers have the equipment they need for their classrooms.
- **Triple Title I to dramatically equalize access to educational resources**, rigorous curricula, and well-trained teachers.

## Affordable Housing

Homelessness among Native American communities [is far too prevalent](#). Many who cannot live with family in overcrowded homes find themselves living on the streets. To address these extreme economic inequities and honor our commitment to Native American communities, Tom will:

- **Support funding for Bureau of Indian Affairs housing programs and ensure that Native Americans can access HUD's Continuum of Care** so Tribal communities have the resources to respond to high rates of homelessness.
- **Invest more than \$625 billion over ten years in housing programs** and mobilize an additional \$600 billion to foster climate-smart cities and spur the construction and renovation of 3.5 million units of affordable housing.

## Expand Broadband Access on Tribal Lands

[Barely half](#) of Native Americans living on Tribal lands have access to high speed internet. Internet Service Providers fail to serve Tribal lands despite receiving large government [subsidies](#). To increase Tribal connectivity and the ability to participate in the high-tech economy, Tom commits to \$135 billion in Rural Utilities Service Grants and Universal Service Grants and loans alongside mobilizing private investment for broadband, fiber, and next generation networks and 60% of the \$135 billion in new funding will be targeted to disadvantaged communities, with at least 10% of the funds set aside to improve connectivity on Tribal lands.

# Political Reform

Tom has put forward bold solutions to address the structural failures in our political system that have allowed big corporations to purchase our democracy, including instituting congressional term limits, a National Vote by Mail initiative, 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 Tom's full support along with independent redistricting commissions to create broader representation in the House of Representatives and legislatures throughout the country.