



MENOMINEE INDIAN TRIBE OF WISCONSIN

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 28, 2024

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Menominee Nation Chairwoman Joins President Biden Aboard Air Force One for Historic Trip to Indian Country

“We look forward to what comes next.”

(Keshena, WI) – On Thursday, Oct. 24, 2024, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin Chairwoman Gena Kakkak accompanied U.S. President Joe Biden on Air Force One ahead of an event in the Gila River Indian Community in Arizona, where the President issued a formal apology on behalf of the United States for the failed assimilation policy of Indian boarding schools. Six tribal leaders joined the President on his flight to Arizona, during which Chairwoman Kakkak was able to speak to the President about tribal sovereignty, trust and treaty obligations, as well as the importance of language and culture investment in helping indigenous communities heal from the painful impacts brought on by the boarding school era.

“Joining the President aboard Air Force One was not something I ever envisioned doing, but I was honored to join other strong tribal leaders on this flight, where we got to speak with President Biden directly about our government-to-government relationship, the impacts of boarding schools, and highlight areas in need of support.”

On the following day after the flight, President Biden joined Secretary Deb Haaland in Gila River Indian Community, where he delivered a formal apology, acknowledging the pain and suffering inflicted on Native American children and their communities as a result of the boarding schools. The legacy of the boarding school era was one of forced assimilation and culture erasure, when hundreds of thousands of Native American children were taken from their homes between 1869 through the 1960s. At these schools, children as young as the age of four endured years of physical, mental, and emotional abuse, with thousands never returning home. The scars left by this era persist across generations, impacting Native families and communities today. The President stated it was “one of the most horrific chapters in American history.”

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“The President’s apology is an important step that acknowledges the voices of our survivors, the spirits of those who did not make it home, and the strength and resiliency of our communities who have had to deal with decades of intergenerational trauma that resulted from this shameful and dark chapter in American history,” Chairwoman Kakkak shared. “Our communities, and particularly our elders who survived these schools, have waited a long time for this, and while this formal apology matters deeply, we also look forward to what comes next.”

Chairwoman Kakkak hopes the acknowledgement and apology leads to greater support for things such as language and culture revitalization, as well as more mental health resources that help create space for continued healing in indigenous communities. “While it was an historic and important day,” added Kakkak, “this is just part of the reparative journey and paves the way for much needed work ahead. The impact of intergenerational trauma this era caused cannot be overstated. This requires purposeful investment in the very things taken from us and I have great hope we are taking a step forward. Tribal leaders having direct conversations with the President underscores the seriousness and greater emphasis being placed on our government-to-government relationship, and we look forward to working on this further with the federal government in a way that brings about greater healing for Menominee people as well as all of Indian Country.”

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The Menominee Nation, having no migration story, are the oldest inhabitants of what we now call Wisconsin. For more information on the Menominee Nation, visit our website at www.menominee-nsn.gov.

PHOTO ATTACHED