

VA250 | America's Semiquincentennial Celebration: Inspiring A Season of Civic Renewal

Signature Event (April 24 & 25, 2026) @ Colonial Williamsburg, VA

Our Inherently Sovereign Status & Existence as Tribal Nations: Exploring and Understanding a Unique, Complicated, and Intertwined Diplomatic Relationship with the United States

Friday, April 24

6pm Reception and Dinner

Remarks by The Honorable Mark Warner & The Honorable Tim Kaine

Saturday, April 25

8:00am-8:40

Welcome & Tee Up Grand Entry

8:40-8:55

Grand Entry Procession of Tribal Nations & Posting of Flags

Opportunity to represent the rich diversity of sovereign Tribal Nations from across Turtle Island. In addition to inclusion of each respective nation's flag, it will be an opportunity for individuals to dress in partial/full regalia that will exemplify the impact of regional influences on style of dress and celebrate all the beauty that is Indian Country.

8:55-9:00

Welcome Grounded in Indigenous Spiritual/Prayer Offering

As is our standard practice in Indian Country, but also in recognition of the weightiness of the topics planned for the convening and the important work we must bravely undertake, we must first ground ourselves in our shared respect and reverence for one another as children of the Creator, as well as our shared humanity. Consideration of a fire w/firekeepers throughout the convening.

9:00-9:45

Turtle Island's Sovereign Tribal Nations & Indigenous Peoples Pre-Foreign Contact

Indigenous peoples have inhabited these lands since time immemorial. Contrary to the Declaration of Independence's portrayal of us as uncivilized "savages," we were and remain thriving Tribal Nations, made up of families enduring everyday challenges and opportunities, growing and evolving communities and governance structures, and so much more. It is important to set this foundation of understanding to better understand the intentional and despicable destruction that followed.

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9:45-9:50 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

9:50-10:35

The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy's Influence of the American Democratic Government Model

A tremendous amount of research has been conducted to validate and confirm the influence of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy on the American model of democracy. This rarely receives appropriate and respectful reflection in U.S. History, so it is important to bring this forward as part of the overall story of the United States' origins, growth, and evolution.

10:35-10:40 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

10:40-10:55 BREAK

10:55-11:40

Two Pillars of Truth: Advocating for Our Inherent Sovereignty & U.S. Debt-Based Trust and Treaty Obligations

Although federal Indian law and policy have evolved into complicated morass, the direction to follow to achieve a more just system is clear. Each step we take must be in furtherance of the two pillars that (1) Tribal Nations are inherently sovereign, and (2) that the United States owes debt-based trust and treaty obligations to Indian Country resulting from taking of our lands and natural resources. Though the United States laws do not always uphold these two pillars, advocates must always root their efforts in them.

11:40-11:45 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

11:45-12:00 BREAK

12:00-1:15 LUNCH and SPECIAL KEYNOTE

Special Luncheon Keynote Address: Respecting the Inherent Sovereignty of Tribal Nations
The Honorable Justice Neil Gorsuch will deliver a keynote address on his drive to return to the original bargain struck in the Constitution respecting Tribal Nations' enduring sovereignty within the structure of America. Justice Gorsuch's opinions for the Court provide a clear-eyed primer on the history of federal Indian law and policy and a path toward a more just future informed by that history. Recently, he has drawn on this history to call out the misconceived notion that the Constitution creates unbounded "plenary power" for Congress to strip away Tribal rights. For example, his concurrence in Brackeen described a set of "enumerated" congressional Indian affairs powers bounded by Tribal Nations' sovereignty; his dissent from the Court's denial of certiorari in Veneno characterized "plenary power" as "a theory that should make th[e] Court blush;" and his majority opinion in McGirt urged that courts must presume that the United States intends to keep its promises to Indian Country.

1:15-1:20 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

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1:20-2:05

Tribal Nations-US Relations: An Early through Modern Day Examination

Rooted in the Doctrine of Discovery, it is important to walk through the many federal Indian policies that sought to remove us from our land and destroy our cultures, all in the name of the objectives of Manifest Destiny. In order for the goals and aspirations of America to be achieved, the existing sovereign nations and people were an inconvenient impediment to those goals. Therefore, a whole set of legal fiction was put in place by the colonizing forces to substantiate their inhuman and unjust actions. In addition to a discussion on these historical truths, the goal will be to lean into a forward solutions-based discussion rooted in exertion of sovereign powers through Tribal law and policy.

To appropriately respect today's relationship between Tribal Nations and the United States, it is important to understand the history of that relationship beginning with the pre-nascent U.S., the earliest days of diplomatic relations between our respective governments, our involvement in the Revolutionary War, treaty-making, our sovereign recognition in the U.S. Constitution, etc. The twist of history often diminishes the realities of this early diplomacy, but it is a necessary grounding in support of current efforts to return to a diplomacy-based Nation-to-Nation relationship.

2:05-2:10 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

2:10-2:25 BREAK

2:25-3:00

Evolving from Federal Indian Law to a Robust Exercise of Tribal Law: Building and Exercising Robust Tribal Governance Structures & Re-imagining Domestic Diplomatic Relations to Improve Our Future

3:00-3:05 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

3:05-4:05

Our Future Is Bright: A Forward-Looking Discussion on Overcoming Today's Challenges & Leaning Into Opportunities to Establish Greater Visibility and Prominence

Despite the challenges of our history, we are a beautiful and persevering people. While it is important to understand the journey for context and understanding, more importantly, we choose to prioritize the present and the future. Despite the efforts of colonization and effects of indoctrination, Indian Country is leaning into taking back control of its own destiny. In addition, a stronger Indian Country means a strong America. Beyond the righting of historical injustices, there is a shared interest in our shared success.

Through a diverse set of perspectives, we will explore the diversity of our people and our impacts to Indian Country and the United States. Indian Country is not a monolith, so it is important to reflect this diversity of thought and perspective to achieve our goals of understanding Indian Country today as we forge a new future together.

4:05-4:10 TRANSITION: Native Youth Poetry, Essay, Song Offering

4:10-4:35

Wrap Up Message

4:35-4:45

Closing: Drum, Flags Retirement, Prayer

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