



**MAKING GOOD ON AMERICA'S PROMISES:
WES CLARK'S COMMITMENT TO AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES**

America's Native people have long championed many of the ideals that Wes Clark highlights in his vision for America, including respect for the bonds of family, community and tradition. And General Clark recognizes their invaluable contributions to the U.S. military. From the Code Talkers of World War II to today in Iraq, where brave young Americans such as Lori Piestewa and Sheldon Hawk Eagle gave their lives for our country, American Indians and Alaska Natives have answered the call to service and served this nation with honor.

However, for too long this country has not returned the favor. In most cases, it's done just the opposite. This is not just an issue of history -- the U.S. government continues to deny tribal nations the resources and respect they're due. The Clark Administration will work as partners with tribal governments to do better.

RESPECTING TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY

Today, after centuries of treaties, proclamations and promises, the United States government is still not living up to its end of the bargain with Indian Country. Tribal sovereignty isn't a slogan to be adopted for political advantage -- it's the law of the land. Tribal sovereignty predates American independence. It's spelled out in the United States Constitution and numerous treaties. Wes Clark understands that the U.S. government needs to treat tribal governments like the sovereign, independent entities they are. Tribal leaders, rather than the federal government, know what's best for their communities.

As President, Wes Clark will respect the obligations that the United States has undertaken, through treaties, statutes, and court decisions, to preserve tribal self-government. The federal government has a legal and moral obligation to allow tribes to exercise meaningful self-government over their reservations and trust lands. This obligation includes supporting the authority of tribal courts and law enforcement agencies

Wes Clark's experience working with sovereign governments has led him to take a very different approach to this issue than our current Administration. In 1999, he maintained a coalition of NATO's nineteen member nations while serving as Supreme Allied Commander during the crisis in Kosovo. Instead of bullying America's allies - instead of telling them they were with us or against us - the United States worked with them as partners. The result? Our alliances were strengthened, genocide was averted, and Slobodan Milosevic was captured and is now on trial for war crimes at the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague.

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The alliance that worked in Kosovo represents the kind of government-to-government relationship that Wes Clark believes the federal government should have with tribal governments here in America - one built on independence, partnership, and mutual respect.

AFFIRMING SELF-DETERMINATION AND SELF-GOVERNANCE

Wes Clark understands that Indian Country exemplifies diversity in America. From the high plains of the Dakotas, to the far north of Alaska, and all tribes located throughout the United States from California and the Southwest to Maine and the East Coast, the Native people of our great land have separate tribal governing structures, languages, ceremonies, and traditional practices. As President, Wes Clark will support the full implementation of those laws that support the independent structures of the more than 560 tribal governments, such as the Indian Self-Determination Act and the Self Governance program. Tribes must be empowered to provide services to their own tribal members, which means they must be given the flexibility to use federal funds to implement community-based solutions to local problems.

IMPROVING HEALTH CARE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

American Indians and Alaska Natives should be able to access health care on an equal footing with other Americans. Wes Clark agrees with Tribal Governments who believe, “It is the policy of the nation, in fulfillment of its legal obligation to Indian Tribes, to meet the national goal of providing the highest possible health status to Indians and to provide existing health services with all resources necessary to affect that policy.”

It is inexcusable that the Indian Health Service is facing a \$2.9 billion shortfall in funds for clinical services. That shortfall is unconscionable because tribal nations continue to suffer from alarming rates of cancer, heart disease, alcoholism, and other diseases.

What makes this situation especially disgraceful is that we can make progress against so many of these diseases with an emphasis on prevention. Prevention means looking into issues of diet and exercise. It means making healthcare available in an efficient and timely manner. It means supporting Tribal Governments who seek to provide community-based and culturally appropriate health care. And it means working to reduce the onslaught of toxic chemicals emitted into our air and water by corporate polluters.

Diabetes is a particularly serious problem: It is bad enough that 1 in 11 Americans have diabetes; it is tragic that 1 in 4 American Indians do. If everyone who addresses the issue of diabetes knows that improved diet and greater exercise are a large part of the solution, why isn't the federal government doing anything about it? It is a failure of vision, it is a failure of leadership, and it is a failure that Wes Clark will correct.

America needs to invest in health care. And Wes Clark has a health care plan to provide universal access to affordable insurance for all Americans, and universal coverage for all

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children. His plan will guarantee that every single American has access to the latest diagnostic tests, screening procedures, and preventative services.

Indian health care does not currently operate simply as an extension of the mainstream health system in America. To the contrary, federal support has built a system that is designed to serve Indian people. It is important build upon those programs that Tribes, the Indian Health Service, and other Indian health providers have started. As President, Wesley Clark will recognize tribal governments' special legal status by upholding government-to-government consultation with tribal Governments with the goal of improving access to quality healthcare.

ACHIEVING MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

More than 25% of American Indians and Alaska Natives live in poverty, and in some communities, unemployment is as high as 75 or 80%. While gaming has helped some tribes climb out of poverty, it's far from a cure-all. We need to invest in jobs. And Wes Clark has a jobs plan [<http://clark04.com/issues/jobcreation/>] that reduces the tax cuts Mr. Bush gave the richest households -- those making more than \$200,000 a year -- and directs that \$100 billion to job creation.

Wes Clark is also committed to promoting access to capital and asset building in Indian Country, and to extending the American Indian employment tax credit. He recognizes that Indian Country desperately needs to continue developing adequate infrastructure, including reservation roads and public utility systems. Decent infrastructure is necessary for communities and investors to create economic growth.

By working with tribal governments and Congress, a Clark administration can help generate the public and private investment in tribal economies necessary to improve the standard of living of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

PUTTING FAMILIES FIRST


Finally, economic development needs to be focused on those American families who have suffered the most in recent years. Under Wes Clark's *Families First Tax Reform Plan* [<http://clark04.com/issues/familiesfirst/>], our tax system will be made more simple and more fair. A family of four making up to \$50,000 would pay no federal income taxes, and all taxpaying families with children making up to \$100,000 would get a tax cut.

And this plan would cause no increase to our growing federal budget deficit. The cost will be borne by those most able to pay. Only those who have done the best of late—those making more than \$1 million a year—will pay any more in taxes.

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ENHANCING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

In the long run, the only way to guarantee prosperity is to guarantee that America's children have the best education possible. That isn't the case now, and it is particularly not the case for the children of Indian Country. Approximately 50% of American Indians and Alaska Natives never graduate from high school. Only 17% go to college -- to put that in perspective, the national average is 62%.

We can do better. That means starting early by expanding access to Head Start and fixing crumbling schools. It means not resting until young people in Indian Country have the same, if not better, rates of high school, college, and graduate school success as the rest of America. And that will not happen as long as tribal schools are underfunded and collapsing. America is failing Indian Country's youth, and genuine leadership is required to make things right.

During Wes Clark's time as an officer, he was responsible for the well being of thousands of troops and their families. The military's educational system, like that of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is separate from state and local educational systems. As an officer, Wes Clark saw the education of the boys and girls of our enlisted men and women as a solemn responsibility.

But leadership isn't pretending to have all of the right answers, it is being humble enough to listen to the people in the position to know. Wes Clark, in conjunction with tribal leadership, will make American Indian and Alaska Native education a priority. He fought for the troops under his command, and he will do the same for the children of Indian Country as President.

TRUST REFORM AND REORGANIZATION OF THE BUREAU OF INDIAN AFFAIRS

The federal government must live up to its obligations and exercise true trust responsibility. If the federal government can figure out how to get tens of billions of dollars all the way to Iraq, then it should be able to account for the money owed to American citizens. Paying out money that the government holds in trust is a matter of obligation, not discretion.

Resolving this debacle requires a higher standard of leadership than the Bush administration has demonstrated. Wes Clark will not stand for the current adversarial approach. Instead, he will bring all stakeholders to the table and insist they hammer out a fair settlement.

Settling the Cobell litigation would free up the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and Department of Interior to move forward. We cannot have the BIA and the Interior Department paralyzed any longer. In moving forward, a Clark administration would consult with the leaders of Indian Country about the proper structure of the BIA – there would be no more riders arrogantly inserted without proper notice or tribal input.

IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE

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The housing situation in Indian Country is a shame. Such conditions should not exist amidst the wealth of America. It is very difficult for children to pursue the education required in the 21st Century when they return to homes that lack such basic necessities as running water. Wes Clark is committed to making progress that helps to reduce suffering and level society's playing field.

Another key step is to address Indian Country's plague of predatory lending. We need both a review of lending practices in Indian Country and a President committed to seeking mechanisms to address and prevent practices that prey on the innocent.

America must address the high rate of housing discrimination faced by American Indians and Alaska Natives. For instance, a recent HUD study compared white prospective renters with equally qualified nonwhite renters. The study of the metropolitan areas of New Mexico, Montana and Minnesota found Native American renters discriminated against at 28 percent of the time in the -- a rate even higher than the indefensibly high rates of discrimination suffered by African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans.

Additionally, crime is rampant in Indian Country. Wes Clark would work with tribal leaders to figure out the best way to tailor general anti-crime initiatives to the particular needs of Indian Country. It is wrong that American Indians are victims of violent crime more than twice as frequently as other Americans. It is appalling that American Indian women are the victims of rape three times more frequently than white women.

We not only need to work to punish criminals, but we have to develop a strategy to prevent crime.

PRESERVING NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

Protecting our shared natural and cultural resources—our air, water, plants, and animals—cannot be taken for granted, especially in light of the Bush Administration's record of betraying the public trust and mortgaging our children's future. Wes Clark is committed to doing better.

As President, Wes Clark will work hard to preserve and enforce tribal water rights. Water issues are frequently resolved at the state government level, either within a state or in negotiations between states. That process too often excludes sovereign tribal governments from meaningful participation in discussions that concern a topic central to reservation life. Wes Clark will ensure that tribal governments receive a full seat at the table whenever the issues of great importance to Indian Country, including water rights, are being negotiated. He would resume the progress finally achieved under President Clinton to address these historic oversights. Specifically, in a Clark administration, the Departments of Interior and Justice will work with tribal leaders to push age-old disputes toward settlement.

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Sacred lands, native languages and cultural landscapes are other important, interconnected components of healthy tribal communities. Wes Clark will work with tribal governments to uphold and enforce our nation's environmental and cultural resource laws so that traditional practices are protected for current and future use.

HONORING AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE VETERANS AND RESERVISTS

General Clark appreciates the tremendous rate of service of American Indians and Alaska Natives. Today, the Bush administration has turned its back on veterans from all walks of life. General Clark's commitment to our veterans and soldiers is more than just policy; it is where his heart is and will always be.

For more, see Wes Clark's open letter [<http://www.clark04.com/naveterans/>] to American Indian and Alaska Native veterans.

INCLUDING THE ENTIRE HOMELAND IN HOMELAND SECURITY

It is clear that America needs to invest in homeland security. This is an especially serious concern for tribal governments. Tribal governments are responsible for hundreds of miles of our borders, and for their tribal members who live near missile sites, power plants, dams and other likely targets for terrorist attacks. As President, Wes Clark would change the current administration's policy of giving first responder funding to states and municipalities, but not a single penny of such funding directly to tribal governments.

Wes Clark takes national security seriously and will not rest until this country - every last acre of it - is safe. He will fight for equitable funding and representation that will ensure that Indian Country participates fully in our nation's efforts to provide security for all Americans.

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