

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR TOM UDALL, VICE CHAIRMAN OF THE UNITED STATES SENATE INDIAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

Welcome to everyone far and wide attending today's virtual event marking the 30th Anniversary of the *Native American Languages Act*. Thanks to this momentous law and the tireless work of Native language advocates, so much has been achieved, and the future of Native language preservation and revitalization efforts is bright. My warm congratulations goes out to you all!

When Congress shifted federal policy to align with the rights and work of Native communities in 1990, it was a watershed moment. Because it meant that the United States recognizes language as more than an expression of identity – but also as an embodiment of sovereignty. And that ideals must be combined with actions to see real, positive change.

Native communities have done so much to fight for Native languages and advance the conversation around language rights. Throughout my service in Congress, it's been an honor to join in this work – especially during my time as vice chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee.

Together, we have pushed the federal government to live up to the policies set out in the *Native American Languages Act*. In 2006, we enacted the *Esther Martinez Native American Language Preservation Act*, which took inspiration from the revitalization work of Native communities and expanded federal resources programs under the *Native American Languages Act*. In 2015, we gained support for Native language immersion programs at the Department of Education in the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* reauthorization. And in 2019, we secured passage of the *Esther Martinez Native American Languages Programs Reauthorization Act*.

Recognizing and protecting the cultural rights of Native communities – and, by extension, standing with you to fight for Native languages – has always been one of my priorities. The federal government must commit itself to righting past wrongs and respecting the cultural sovereignty of all Native peoples. And it must support the vital grassroots Native language maintenance and revitalization work communities do each day.

I'm doing my part to elevate that urgent message in Congress. This week, I issued a call to action for my Senate colleagues in a statement for the Congressional Record. And I'm unveiling a new legislative proposal to hold the federal government accountable for its work to fulfill the policies and principles set out by Senators Inouye and McCain in the *Native American Languages Act*.

We must keep fighting together to ensure the survival of Native languages. I look forward to continuing to be your partner in this work for years to come. Thank you for all that you do.