



2024-25 **IMPACT** **REPORT**

YOUR **SUPPORT**. OUR **STORIES**. LIVES **TRANSFORMED**.





Levi Rickert

Publisher and Editor

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Rickert', written in a cursive style.

Letter from Levi: A Year of Stories of Impact

In our 13th year, *Native News Online's* journalism drove real change across Indian Country and beyond. When news outlets spread misleading data about Native voting patterns, our groundbreaking polling collaboration with Northwestern University provided accurate insights into tribal electoral preferences. When NASA planned to send human remains to the moon without tribal consultation, our coverage helped unite and amplify the voices of Native nations in protecting sacred spaces.

Our team covered stories others wouldn't or couldn't. We documented every stop of the Interior Department's "Road to Healing" tour, publishing nearly 250 stories about Indian boarding schools that culminated in a landmark book. We tracked the 100th anniversary of Native citizenship, highlighted innovative tribal responses to the opioid crisis, and maintained pressure for Leonard Peltier's freedom.

Through publishing partnerships with *The Guardian*, *Elle*, and other major outlets, we amplified Native voices to broader audiences while maintaining focus on critical issues long after mainstream media moved on. *Native News Online* expanded its unique dedicated health desk in 2024, reporting extensively on the inequities affecting tribal communities. Our Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit brought together tribal leaders and Native enterprise executives, showcasing how Indigenous communities are building sovereign futures.

This report demonstrates the growing influence and necessity of Native journalism in an era of rapid change. We're grateful for your support as we continue ensuring Native Americans are seen, heard, understood and valued.

Thayèk gde nwéndëmen - We are all related.



Vision Statement

Our vision is to “change the narrative” about Indian Country by providing truthful, timely and relevant journalism about the issues that affect Indigenous people in North America. We want to build — and serve — an audience of Native and non-Native people and intend to make our news accessible and free for all.

Mission Statement

The mission of *Native News Online* is to ensure that American Indian, Alaska Native and other Indigenous people in North America are seen, heard, understood and valued. Our mission is grounded in delivering honest, timely, and relevant journalism that centers on the Native perspective. Through our work, we strive to amplify Native voices, enhance Indigenous representation in the media, and bring attention to the richness of Native history, heritage, and culture. By sharing truthful narratives and compelling stories, we hope to enlighten, uplift, and inspire Native Americans — and educate all Americans about Native people living in contemporary times.

Native Perspective. Native Voices. Native News.



Heritage Unbound | Native American Citizenship at 100

A month-long commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924, also known as the Snyder Act, took place in June 2024.

The Act is named after Representative Homer Snyder, a congressman from New York, who worked on getting the legislation through Congress because of Native Americans who participated in World War I without being citizens of the United States.

On June 2, 1924, President Calvin Coolidge signed the Act into law, granting U.S. citizenship to approximately 125,000 of the 300,000 Native Americans living at the time. The remaining Native Americans had already attained citizenship through land ownership, intermarriage, treaties, or court rulings.

With citizenship usually comes the right to vote. However, some states, such as Arizona and Utah, did not allow Native Americans to vote until

decades later. The lack of voting rights back then led to several discussions during a 2024 Native News live stream, as Native leaders correlated it to voter suppression of Native Americans that still takes place today — 100 years after the Snyder Act was signed.

Native American leaders were in unison that the anniversary was a commemoration, not a celebration. U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) wrote in an essay for *Native News Online*:

“It is difficult for me to order out the fireworks in celebration of the Indian Citizenship Act’s centennial, because my people were here long before the Mayflower and the Pilgrims. We have always been citizens of this continent. Our citizenship runs deep, and in spite of every Indian war, assimilation policy, and outright assault on our land, animals, and ways of life by newcomers, we have persevered.”

STORIES WITH IMPACT



Protecting Democracy + Tribal Sovereignty | Native Vote 2024

While voters on both sides of the political spectrum believed the 2024 presidential election was about “saving democracy in America,” Indian Country faced its own democratic crisis. A century after 1924 Indian Citizenship Act granted Native Americans the right to vote, our communities still face voter suppression in many states — a stark reminder that fight for voting rights in Indian Country continues.

We recognized the importance of safeguarding the Native vote during the election. To us, ensuring Native Americans were free from voting barriers was, in essence, saving democracy in Indian Country.

Just four years earlier, during the 2020 presidential election, we knew the Native vote made the difference in several states, such as Arizona and Wisconsin, where Native Americans voted overwhelmingly for Joe Biden.

In 2024, we aimed for robust coverage of the election. We conducted four separate surveys with the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University to assess support for the presidential candidates. Our reporters attended both the Republican and Democratic national conventions and covered rallies for the presidential and vice-presidential candidates.

In total, *Native News Online* published over 100 articles on the Native vote and produced four live streams, and six podcasts.

Our coverage was an effort to ensure the Native vote was not taken for granted, helping to ensure democracy was safe in Indian Country.

We adhered to the principle that Native Americans should not necessarily vote Democratic or Republican but should cast their votes for the “tribal sovereignty ticket”—the candidates who best support the issues most important to Indian Country.



STORIES WITH IMPACT



Photo: Elyse Wild



Photos: Deidre Elrod



Two Medicines | A Pulitzer Health Equity Series

While national overdose rates have [declined in recent years](#), Native communities continue to see increases, especially in rural and remote areas where health access is limited by distance, poverty, and lack of infrastructure.

These barriers, combined with generational trauma, broken treaty promises, and chronic underfunding, created fertile conditions for the opioid crisis. As tribes work to save lives and heal relatives affected by the crisis, Native communities are building addiction care systems that blend cultural practices and traditional values with Western science.

This 3-part series, produced in partnership with the **Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting**, examines how tribal communities prove that combining Indigenous practices with Western medicine creates more effective addiction treatment for their citizens. Each article explores a component of addiction care — prevention, harm reduction, and recovery — through tribal programs and Native-run organizations.

From an equine therapy program in Oregon, to roadside naloxone drives in Choctaw Nation and Penobscot healing lodges, Two Medicines shows the power of culture as Native communities address an unprecedented drug crisis.

STORIES WITH IMPACT

Indian Boarding Schools | Breaking the Silence to Start Healing

Our unflinching coverage of America's Indian boarding school history over the past four-and-a-half years became one of *Native New Online's* most important projects ever. Through nearly 300 stories, we documented survivor testimonies, tracked federal investigations, and followed tribes bringing their children home.

We were the only news organization to attend all 12 stops of Interior's "Road to Healing" tour, ensuring these vital stories reached national audiences through our reporting as well as live stream events. Our team appeared on mainstream media outlets to educate millions about boarding schools' lasting impact on Native families. At national conferences, Publisher Levi Rickert and longtime Senior Reporter Jenna Kunze talked about how journalism can support healing and repatriation efforts.

In 2024, we published a landmark book compiling this coverage, including previously untold stories like Leonard Peltier's boarding school account. Our sustained reporting helped build momentum for President Biden's historic apology, showing how Indigenous journalism can help transform a story "that almost wasn't told" into a national reckoning with truth and healing. As Levi wrote in the book: *"These stories are hard to hear, but we know that giving survivors and their descendants the opportunity to share their stories is an important step toward healing — not just because they are speaking, but because they are being heard."*

To get the book, visit: <https://nativenewsonline.net/uncategorized/get-the-book>



INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

A Native News Online Reporting Project
featuring essays by Deborah Parker and Leonard Peltier

A man with a beard, wearing a plaid shirt and a cap, is looking into a black bag filled with supplies. The bag contains several clear plastic bags, some containing white pills, and other items. He is standing next to a white van. The background is a clear blue sky.

STORIES WITH IMPACT

Rolling Hope | Co-Publishing Project

As tribal nations work to reduce deadly overdoses, many embrace harm reduction — an evidence-based public health strategy to reduce the worst outcomes of drug use without demanding abstinence.

Primarily driven by grassroots efforts, tribal governments have launched harm reduction programs distributing live-saving overdose reversal drugs, clean needles, and testing strips that can detect illicit opioids.

For this story — co-published by *Native News Online* and *The Guardian* — we took readers to the Cherokee Nation for a ride in the tribe's mobile harm reduction unit, a van bringing supplies to the hardest hit areas of the rural reservation. The article spotlighted how Native communities were flooded by prescription opioids by pharmaceutical companies and how innovative, Native-led solutions are adapting critical public health strategies to the unique challenges of reservations.

Photo: Shane Brown

STORIES WITH IMPACT

Seeking Justice for Our Missing Relatives | MMIP Awareness

Indigenous people face murder rates 10 times the national average. [Homicide remains one of the leading causes of death for Native women](#). While the Bureau of Indian Affairs estimates 4,200 unsolved Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) cases, the actual number is likely higher.

The MMIP crisis stems from severely underfunded tribal law enforcement, jurisdictional confusion, the exclusion of Indigenous people in data, and limited media coverage.

Native families whose loved ones have gone missing or were found murdered report a lack of police response and cases closed without sufficient investigation. Many are left to conduct their own investigations while grappling with profound grief.

Since 2023, *Native News Online* has published more than 50 stories highlighting grassroots efforts to create solutions and expose systemic failures. A few of them stood out: We profiled a group of Native women who ride motorcycles more than 2,000 miles annually in ceremony for MMIP, their bikes adorned with ribbons bearing the names of the lost. We interviewed Haley Omeasoo (Hopi, Blackfeet) about launching the first DNA forensics lab dedicated to MMIP cases. We also tracked state and federal policy efforts to direct federal resources to victims' families, highlighting what's working — and what's not.

Photo: Kaili Berg



Sacred Space | Building Tribal Unity to Protect the Moon

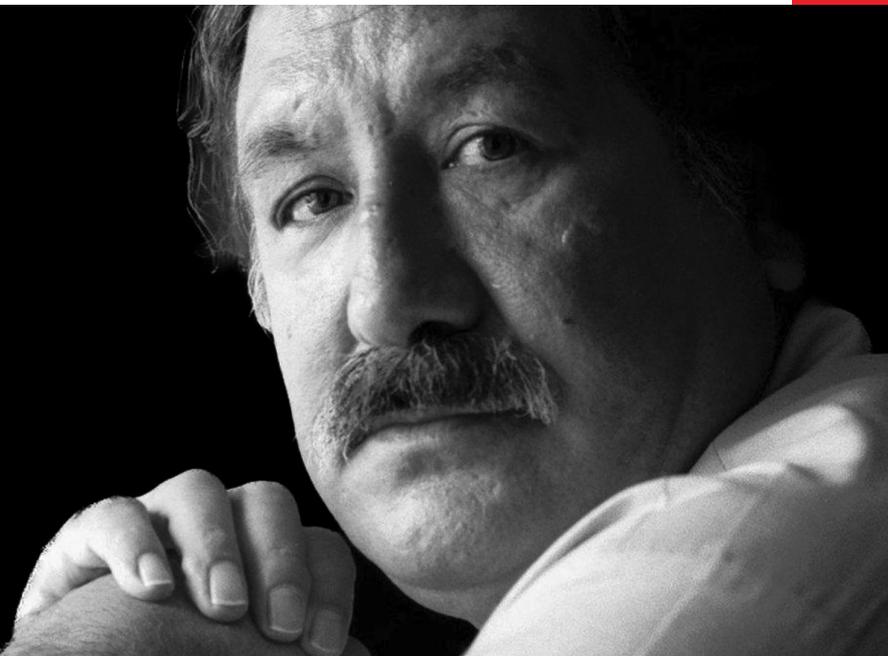
When the Navajo Nation challenged NASA's plans to send human remains to the sacred lunar surface of the moon, our coverage helped spark a movement. Within days, the Coalition of Large Tribes (COLT), representing over 50 tribes with vast land holdings, joined the protest, drawing national media attention from CNN, NPR and other mainstream outlets.

Our stories — two of the most-read articles on *Native News Online* in 2024 — highlighted recurring issues in federal-tribal relations: NASA had previously apologized for a similar incident in the 1990s and promised tribal consultation, yet prepared to repeat the same oversight. As humanity plans lunar colonization and commercial development, our reporting revealed NASA's contradictory stance — promoting an Indigenous Peoples Initiative while claiming no authority over commercial payloads.

COLT Chairman Marvin Weatherwax's powerful statement that tribal consultation must be respected "even when it is inconvenient" resonated across Indian Country. Our coverage, shared widely across Indigenous and mainstream platforms, demonstrated how Native media can amplify Native voices to protect sacred spaces — even those beyond Earth.



STORIES WITH IMPACT



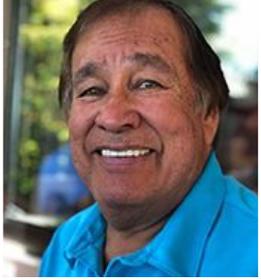
Leonard Peltier | The Power of Persistence

When the news broke on Martin Luther King Jr. Day 2025 that President Biden had commuted Leonard Peltier's sentence, it marked a milestone in *Native News Online's* 13-year commitment to covering his story. Our newsroom had published hundreds of articles about the Native elder's fight for freedom during his nearly 50-year incarceration, becoming a leading Native media voice in documenting his case.

Throughout 2024, our coverage intensified. We broke exclusive stories, including NCAI President Mark Macarro's pivotal discussion about Peltier with President Biden aboard Air Force One. We tracked the growing chorus of supporters calling for his release - from tribal leaders to members of Congress. When Peltier was denied parole that summer, we highlighted his declining health and amplified Senator Schatz's unprecedented Senate floor speech advocating for clemency. We also included Peltier's powerful boarding school testimony in our book *Indian Boarding Schools: A Native News Online Reporting Project* published last year.

Now, as Peltier returns home to the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation after 17,532 days behind bars, our work continues. His story exemplifies why Indigenous media must maintain focus on critical Native issues long after mainstream outlets move on. We documented his imprisonment, we covered his release, and we'll be there to tell the next chapter of his remarkable journey.

Leading Change and Making News



Native Bidaské

“Shining light on those making news and leading change in Indian Country”

Native Bidaské (Spotlight) is a popular weekly live stream interview show that features Indigenous people making news and leading change in Indian Country. Produced and distributed by *Native News Online*, the show is broadcast across multiple social media platforms – including Facebook, YouTube and X (formerly known as Twitter) – and our own web and e-newsletter platforms.

The term “Bidaské,” derived from the Potawatomi language, translates to “shining light on to” or “spotlight,” which captures the essence of the series.

Launched in 2022, the show has featured a distinguished array of Indigenous people, including state and federal officials, actors and authors, educators and environmentalists, models and activists, filmmakers and media personalities, and others. A few are highlighted above on this page.

Hosted by Editor and Publisher Levi Rickert, Native Bidaské features compelling and timely conversations that are tapped into the news of the week in Indian Country.

Pictured (from left): Olympian Billy Mills, *Reservation Dogs* creator Sterlin Harjo, film producer Sarah Eagle Heart, Former Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren, screenwriter Miciania Alise.

Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit

The Great Lakes Tribal Economic Summit, a yearly gathering organized by our *Tribal Business News* affiliate, has quickly become a vital platform for tribal leaders and Native executives from Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota to discuss and highlight their economic advancements.

The summit centers on the evolving economic development landscape in Indian Country, emphasizing diversification beyond traditional casino businesses. It tackles emerging opportunities in federal contracting, real estate development, and expanding sectors such as clean energy and Native tourism.

Fostering collaboration, information exchange, and inspiration among Native professionals, the summit draws attendees from across the Great Lakes region and the entire country. Additionally, as tribes navigate challenges like construction industry dynamics, talent sourcing, and material lead times, the summit acts as a hub for state and federal agencies to discuss investments in tribal communities.

The summit's growing attendance and positive impact on tribal economic development over its first three years demonstrate its success in encouraging diversification and long-term strategic thinking.





Reader & Donor Metrics | 2024

32,497 newsletter subscribers

3.1 million online readers

4.6 million pageviews

1,838 readers made donations

\$35,000 of donations matched in December 2024



Pictured (from left): Associate Editor Brian Edwards interviewing the Deputy Administrator of the SBA; Publisher Levi Rickert and reporter Neely Bardwell are joined by Dr. Aaron Payment to discuss election survey results; Levi Rickert joins webcast Politics in Color at the 2024 DNC; Senior Editor Elyse Wild lighting up Navajo Nation; Reporter Neely Bardwell joins Native America Calling at the 2024 DNC

Native News in the Community

The *Native News Online* team actively engages with and contributes to the community it covers, Indian Country, surpassing traditional journalism norms. Instead of merely observing, the team immerses itself in the community, convening tribal leaders to discuss critical issues such as Native mental health, economic sovereignty, and the impact of Indian boarding schools. Embracing education, the team volunteers to teach journalism to students of all ages, emphasizing the role of journalism in Indian Country.

Through volunteering, participation in panel discussions, and interviews with national and regional media, the team shares the Native perspective on crucial matters, including tribal economic sovereignty and repatriation of Native ancestors. Levi Rickert's trusted relationships with tribal leaders underscore the team's dedication to fostering open dialogue and addressing community concerns. This comprehensive engagement underscores a sincere commitment to understanding and amplifying the voices of Indian Country.

Make An Impact. Join the Founder's Circle.

We formed the Founder's Circle in 2023 for readers who want to support our journalism and work more closely with us in pursuit of our mission to ensure that Native Americans are heard, seen, understood and valued. Readers who join the Founder's Circle in 2025 will receive:

- Exclusive quarterly briefing from Publisher Levi Rickert
- Exclusive invitation to quarterly Zoom call with Levi and our team
- Quarterly opportunity to share your thoughts and ideas
- A copy of our 2025 book, which will be published this spring

To join, we ask that you make a recurring monthly contribution of \$15 or more, or a one-time donation of \$175 this year. It's our 14th year of publishing *Native News Online*, and we hope you'll join us.

To join, visit nativenewsonline.net/donate or mail a check to: Indian Country Media, LLC, P.O. Box 1629, Grand Rapids, MI 49501-1629



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