



Raising Our Hands to an Indian Warrior

by W. Ron Allen

I have a deep appreciation for many warriors I've had the honor to work with. I have been inspired by many women warriors including Pearl Capoeman-Baller, Dee Pigsley, Lorraine Loomis, and my tribe's Vice Chair, Liz Mueller. These individuals encompass only a few of the many astute leaders who have blazed the progressive trails for us and whose contributions and guidance we carry with us every day.

I would like to raise my hands to honor Jackie Johnson-Pata (Tlingit), a woman warrior for Indian Country. I have worked with Jackie for well over 25 years, but for the last 18 years, she has been a dedicated, passionate leader for the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI). Last month she officially resigned from NCAI, ending an unparalleled chapter in Indian history.

Jackie's leadership has grown and solidified the foundation of NCAI as a powerful political force in the national arena. Under Jackie's direction, NCAI has fought for and achieved many political successes for Indian Country and continues to further its mission: to protect and advance the sovereignty, treaty rights, traditional practices and address the social and economic needs of the 573 American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in America.

Since 1989, I have served as an Officer of NCAI in many leadership capacities, including, my current tenure as Treasurer. I have witnessed first-hand Jackie's enduring impact on the recruitment and management of NCAI's organizational capacity. Few can appreciate the responsibilities that come with Indian Country's expectations, or successfully maneuver the role's complex and intense demands. We often say our jobs are 24/7, as there is little time to enjoy any of our victories because the next challenge is already upon us.

When I came into the NCAI's leadership in 1989, we could not figure out how deeply in debt our organization was, and we had only two staff members at the time. The rest of us were volunteers. The situation was so dire that the IRS wanted to close our doors. Since then, we and our member tribes dug our way out and began our journey to stabilize our fiscal foundation. That journey was challenging for the next decade. In 2001, we hired Jackie to take over the role and duties of Executive Director. Since that year, Jackie has built the organization to an asset value of over \$18 million and a staff of over thirty-five members.

Of all of her accomplishments, what I've been most impressed by is how she and the talent that NCAI has been blessed to recruit have dealt with the Congress, the Administration(s) and the Federal Court system in collaboration with the Native American Rights Fund (NARF). Given the



Jackie Johnson-Pata

magnitude of instructions and priorities that emanate from the NCAI conferences, the charges could be overwhelming. The weight of those expectations never distracted Jackie from keeping the staff focused on the most pressing crisis impacting our sovereignty or the direct attacks on tribal governments.

Under Jackie's leadership, we purchased our first Embassy of Tribal Nations in Washington, D.C. She strategically planned and managed the annual White House Tribal Nations meeting for eight successive years under the Obama Administration.

I have always observed that while success is great, it does raise expectations. Indian Country deeply appreciates strong, focused efforts to advance our tribal political agenda even if they are not always successful. I have appreciated Jackie's political astuteness in assessing what is achievable. A great deal of Jackie's insight and instinct comes from years of relationship-building with all people (Indian and non-Indian alike) of differing political or philosophical views. It requires patience, determination and diplomacy.

In addition to her political effectiveness in Washington, D.C. and in other political forums, Jackie has helped NCAI work collaboratively with national sister organizations, i.e. NIGA, NIHB, NIEA, NICWA, NAIHC, and others. These relationships are not always perfectly aligned, but she worked hard to be on the "same page" to advance their political agenda. Jackie knew unity was essential. She knew that the success of the tribes depended on economic self-reliant goals; including, the gaming industry.

The next Executive Director or CEO of NCAI will inherit the foundation Jackie helped establish: a talented staff and a network of organizational relationships including foundations (e.g., Ford, Wells Fargo, and Kellogg) and kindred organizations advocating for peoples of color with whom Jackie had the foresight and innovative thinking to formulate partnerships. She has been blessed with amazing energy, talent and gifts that have benefited Indian Country throughout her career, including the last 18 years with NCAI.

We always appreciate the "doers" of Indian Country and Jackie is one of them. She will be remembered by many of us as one who truly made a difference and solidified our national foundation of unity. She is a model Indian warrior!

W. Ron Allen is Tribal Chairman and CEO of the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe. He can be reached by calling (360) 681-4621 or email rallen@jamestowntribe.org.