



# CITY OF SEATTLE

May 18, 2020

South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem  
Office of the Governor  
500 East Capitol Avenue  
Pierre, SD 57501

*Re: Inter-Governmental Cooperation and COVID-19 Infection Prevention*

Dear Governor Noem:

We, the Seattle City Council and Seattle Mayor, write to you today in support of the Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux Nations as they exercise their sovereignty to help our country mitigate the spread of novel coronavirus (COVID-19) by erecting road and highway checkpoints for travelers. COVID-19 honors no boundaries – national, state, local, or tribal. It is an insidious disease that transcends geographic demarcations. Your correspondence to Lakota Nation government officials suggesting that their infection prevention efforts interfere with traffic is untenable.

The United States has banned travel to and from China and disallowed non-essential travel to Canada. The State of Hawaii has quarantined travelers who arrive to the Hawaiian Islands for fourteen days. The Makah Nation has excluded non-residents from entry upon their reservation in the remote corner of northwest Washington State. Each of these Pan-Pacific and West Coast travel restrictions has impacted the City of Seattle and State of Washington in significant ways. But because sovereigns enjoy the right to protect their citizens, and to maintain public health by prohibiting or restricting travel, we respect each of those sovereigns' decisions.

The Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux Nations also enjoy that sovereign right—and nothing less. In fact, under Treaties that the U.S. Constitution recognizes as supreme law, these Lakota Nations retain territorial sovereignty to restrict entry upon their reservations. We understand the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 in particular, supports this right. We are committed to respecting the inherent sovereignty, Treaty rights, and territorial authority of Indigenous Nations. We accept that Indigenous sovereigns can choose, and have chosen, to chart their own path of infection prevention in accordance with the unique needs of their lands and peoples.

We empathize with the people of the Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux Nations as they seek to keep their lands and peoples safe from harm. The Indian Health Service (IHS) continues to be the most chronically underfunded healthcare system in the United States, despite federal promises to Indigenous Nations dating back to the 1800s. Rural Indigenous communities that rely on IHS medical care have extremely limited resources to test and treat COVID-19. Knowing that our own community's urban Indigenous healthcare partners are chronically underfunded and short-staffed, we can only imagine the severity of challenges now facing the Lakota Nations. Indigenous peoples in our country, as in our city, suffer from disproportionate rates of diabetes, heart disease, asthma and cancer, as compared to other



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racial or ethnic groups. Those are all COVID-19 risk factors. Very recent studies seem to show that in fatal COVID-19 cases, some of the most common comorbidities were diabetes or heart disease. These health disparities, which are a direct result of historic federal government policies that displaced and sought to erase Indigenous communities, disproportionately place Indigenous peoples at higher risk for severe complications and possibly fatal outcomes related to COVID-19.

The Indigenous peoples who live and work in our city suffer from those same diseases at rates that are disproportionate as compared to our non-Indigenous residents. Now more than ever before it is incumbent upon all of us in local, state, federal, and tribal governmental leadership to work preemptively and collaboratively to protect and save lives. Every government in our nation—from Hawaii to Lakota to Washington, D.C.—is setting an example for our sister governments and for our constituents to follow. By setting a positive example of respect for and tolerance of one another, we are setting the tone for an expeditious and humane recovery for our country.

Please abandon your ultimatum to the Cheyenne River, Oglala, and Rosebud Sioux Nations and restore the inter-governmental collaboration and cooperation that our entire country needs right now. Due to the fast-paced spread of this indiscriminate disease, the decisions of one government could very much impact us all. To that end, if there is anything that the City of Seattle can do to help South Dakota or the Lakota Nations overcome COVID-19, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Sincerely,

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Mayor Jenny A. Durkan

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Council President M. Lorena González

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Councilmember Lisa Herbold

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Councilmember Debora Juarez



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Councilmember Andrew J. Lewis

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Councilmember Tammy J. Morales

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Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda

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Councilmember Alex Pedersen

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Councilmember Kshama Sawant

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Councilmember Dan Strauss

CC:

Chairman Harold C. Frazier, Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe  
President Julian Bear Runner, Oglala Lakota Nation  
President Rodney M. Bordeaux, Rosebud Sioux Tribe