November is Native American Heritage Month, and in celebration I would like to share some of the awesome contributions Indigenous Peoples of the Americas have given to the world.

Government

The US Government adopted several aspects of Native American governance. Benjamin Franklin liked the idea of a central government that held certain powers while other powers were specified to the states. This idea was taken from the Iroquois Six Nation Confederacy and acknowledged in 1988 by the Senate, stating the confederation of the original thirteen colonies into one republic was influenced by the Iroquois Confederacy, as were many of the democratic principles which were incorporated into the constitution itself. One of the adopted concepts was the Great Law of Peace, which resonated with the Founding Fathers as a way to unify the colonies. Canasatego, a leader of the Iroquois advised the colonists in 1744: "We are a powerful confederacy, and by your observing the same methods our wise Forefathers have taken, you will acquire fresh strength and power." For the Iroquois, 50 peace chiefs oversaw their specified areas, managing and reporting concerns at the intertribal level. A familiar notion that reminds us of the 50 US states and its governors.

Native Americans have served in many branches of the US Government from Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell who is Northern Cheyenne, to Federal Court judge Diane J. Humetewa who is Hopi, to Ojibwa member Winona LaDuke, who was nominated as Vice President of the United States.

It is important to recognize women held important leadership roles in many Native American cultures. For example, Seneca chief Aliquippa was an important ally to George Washington in winning the French Indian War to more recently Wilma Mankiller who was a favorite chief of the Cherokee Nation. Democratic rights of people and protecting the world we live in for future generations has always been key to the lives of Native Americans.

Foods

Did you know that 60% of the world's food supply originated with Native Americans! That's right. From things like potatoes, corn, vanilla, peanuts, chocolate, pumpkins, wild rice, tomatoes, peppers, to even chewing gum! What would life be like without American staples like bubblegum, pizza without sauce, chocolate bars, French fries, chips, peanut butter, or being able to carve a pumpkin on Halloween? Cultures in the Northeast grew corns, beans and squash together and called it the three sisters, because they helped each other to grow. Cocoa was used by the Mayans as a delicious chocolate drink and potatoes saved Ireland during a famine. Many medicines also came from Native Americans including aspirin and plants were also cultivated for things like cotton, and rubber.

Games

Games represented the very heart of Native American cultures with importance being placed on physical well-being, being involved in a community, and caring for and managing the ecology. Games were played not necessarily to win but to become stronger and more skilled, to strengthen ties within and outside the village, and to engage in a form of ceremony. A

game with many players often represented a person's role in the cosmos, the ball or playing object was a type of power one passes from person to person, and how it interplays with the spiritual surrounding. An example being the Thunderbird sitting at the highest scoring level of a goal post. To land the ball into its nest was a sure win.

A great example of this is hockey, a Native American sport called shinny, that was played throughout the Americas. From ice with the Iroquois to the plains with the Potawatomi to the desert Cahuilla in California. A village might challenge another village to settle a hostile confrontation instead of going to war. It was sometimes a little rough as it is now with a whole village playing against another, but in other cases, a game might be had to promote a friendly gathering with a feast and socializing in mind. One of the most important parts of shinny was to try and get the most players on a side to touch the ball before scoring. Depending on the culture, the game was played by men, women and children. Other games invented by Native Americans include the ball game played by the Aztecs and Mayans, the original basketball. Lacrosse, which continues to be a popular game among First Nation cultures, and a game considerably similar to the American football game played by both men and women. Not to mention, one of the greatest athletes to dominate football in the 19th century was a Sac and Fox Native American named Jim Thorpe who also was an Olympic champion. Other Native contributions include relay races, tug-of-wars, ring toss, as well as hand and board games to name just a few.