So, that's a very important discussion that we will continue to have. Now, let me thank this panel. I must introduce the Associate Attorney General. I'm tempted to say that the Associate Attorney General, who's arrived here from Washington D.C., was a victim of the world largest unscheduled airline, but I will not do that. I will not do that because his unscheduled overnight stop in Minneapolis last night was due to a slight weather cooling in the Northern Great Plains.

And so, although he had that unscheduled evening in Minneapolis, he is here now and he's a catalyst for this task force. I just want to tell you about him in about twenty seconds. Bachelor's degree from Harvard, Law Degree from Stanford, President of the Stanford Law Journal, extensive private sector and public sector experience, and this is a better country because of people like Tony West decided to serve their country. Tony West Associate Attorney General.

ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL TONY WEST:
Thank you, Senator Dorgan. I'm very pleased to be here particularly because the journey did
start at 2:30 in the afternoon yesterday and took
us about six hours on the tarmac before we left
D.C. and then we got into Minneapolis last night
too late to get our connection so we flew standby
on the first flight out. But I want you to know
that there was not much that was going to keep us
from being here today for this hearing, and so I
am pleased to be here with you.

Let me acknowledge and thank my
colleagues from the Department of Justice
particularly the administrator of our office of
Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Bob
Listenbee, and Principal Deputy Assistant
Attorney General, Mary Lou Leary for their
excellent leadership in bringing together this
advisory committee, and Jim Antal, the designated
federal official who is the central person who is
responsible for organizing and leading the work
of this advisory committee. My thanks also to
Tracy Toulou who is the Director of our
Department's Office of Tribal Justice, and Deputy
BIA Director, Darren Cruzan, who not only -- both
have been great leaders not only in the work of
this task force but issues for Indian Country.

Let me also recognize two of our U.S.
Attorneys who are with us, Tim Purdon, who is the U.S. Attorney here in the District of North Dakota and is our host and who has been really the critical leader in the federal working group component of this task force, which I'll speak a little about in a minute, and Mike Cotter who is also with us, the U.S. Attorney of the District of Montana, who I know is deeply committed to serving Indian Country.

And, last but not least, let me express my deep appreciation to the task force advisory's committee two co-chairs, Senator Dorgan and Joanne Shenandoah.

As everyone in this room well knows, Senator Dorgan has been a champion of North Dakota's tribes during his entire career, including three decades in Congress. He has been on the front lines of these issues and his commitment to children in tribal nations is simply unparallel, and we are honored that you have agreed to help lead us in this effort.

Likewise, Ms. Shenandoah is a highly respected and deserving celebrated artist who has used her talent to call attention to the plight of children in Indian Country. We are so
fortunate to have you with us as well helping us lead this effort. Thank you for your commitment to this and thank you too to all of the members of this advisory committee for your commitment and for your expertise.

Fifty years ago, Attorney General Robert Kennedy came here to Bismarck and spoke of the tragic irony of first Americans living in the freest country in the world, yet imprisoned by conditions of poverty and depravation; conditions not found in the natural order of things but manmade imposed and perpetrated by bigotry, by greed, and by violence.

And Attorney General Kennedy spoke of our responsibility to reverse the historical tide so that the light of freedom just dawning, as he said in his own lifetime, might fully shine on his children.

And so we've come here to Bismarck, a half century later, to help fulfill that pledge and to reaffirm a promise that we must make to all our children. That their wellbeing, their safety, that is our highest priority, that they are sacred beings, gifts from the Creator to be cherished, to be cared for, to be protected
because the simple sad fact, as we have heard this morning, is that too many of our American Indian and Alaska Native children still suffer or witness violence in Indian Country. Too many see family members or friends fall victim to violence, and too many are victims of violence themselves.

And the impact that this has on the lives of individuals both young and old cannot be overstated. It tears at the fabric of family and community. It disrupts the present and too often darkens the future. The scars of violence can rub deep and have impacts that can seep from one generation into the next.

We know that from our own research at the Department of Justice, that a majority of American's children, more than 60% percent are exposed to some form of violence, crime, or abuse ranging from brief encounters as witnesses to serious episodes, serious violent episodes as victims.

We know that tragically almost 40% percent are direct victims of two or more violent episodes. Often, this violence occurs, as we have just heard from this distinguished panel, in

the place where our children should feel the
safest: At home.

While domestic violence plagues many
communities across our country, research shows us
that the rates of domestic violence against
Native women, are among the highest in the
United States. And while we don't know how many
American Indian and Alaska Native children
witness this kind of violence or how many are
removed from their homes and experience
disruption in their lives as a result of this
kind of violence, or how many end up continuing
the cycle by hurting others because they have
been victims of this kind of violence.

We do know that the consequences of
having been exposed to violence can be serious
for our children ranging from poor academic
performance and drug and alcohol abuse to
long-term psychological harm or even criminal
behavior later in life.

But we also know something else. We
know that we do not have to accept these outcomes
as inevitable. Our young people are resilient.
They can return to living normal, healthy lives so
long as they have the benefit of proper
So, as we've heard from the testimony today, let us look for new ways in which we can engage all community members, tribal spiritual leaders, elders and parents, teachers and coaches, and importantly, young people themselves.

Let us all be enlisted to address this critical issue because it is a challenge that requires no less. And this hearing I think is an important step in that direction. And it's a natural extension of the work that the Obama Administration has pursued to fulfill this nation's trust responsibility and address the challenges that American Indian and Alaska Native communities face.

It grows out of the work that Attorney General Eric Holder began three years ago with a new initiative that he called Defending Childhood. And the goal of Defending Childhood as Professor Deer reminds us, was to improve our knowledge about what works to reduce children's exposure to violence and how to lessen the long term adverse impact of that exposure when it does occur.
As part of that effort, as many of you know, the Attorney General appointed a national task force to identify ways to reduce children's exposure to violence and recommend the concrete policy changes at the federal level to meet that goal. And as Professor Deer said, we are implementing a lot of those recommendations today.

A special effort aimed at examining and addressing the exposure of American Indian and Alaska Native children to violence in ways that recognize the unique government-to-government relationship between sovereign tribal nations and the United States.

Now, there are two parts of this special task force. There is a federal working group comprised of high-ranking federal officials who work with tribal nations everyday, and an advisory committee, this advisory committee, that is made up of experts with insights into children's exposure to violence in Native communities.

Now, the federal working group was formed because we know that there are things that we can do right now, things that don't have to
wait for study, things that can have a direct and immediate impact in kids' lives.

So, officials from the Departments of Justice, the Interior, and Health and Human Services, with proven dedication and experience in Indian Country, they come together as part of this federal working group to do just that. And already this group is making an important difference.

Here's just one example: About a year ago, I traveled to the Ute Mountain Ute and Northern Cheyenne Reservations. And among the places I visited were detention centers where both adults and juveniles were held.

Now as Professor Big Foot reminds us, it is always a tragedy whenever a young person is locked up, but that tragedy is compounded when that child is warehoused without any assistance that can help prevent that child from future incarceration. And in these two facilities, not unlike what Chairman McDonald observed, kids were not getting access to adequate educational programing or counseling.

So, it was the federal working group that came together and tackled this issue. They
cut through the red tape and they worked together such that contracts are now being secured for teachers who will provide culturally sensitive educational and counseling services to Native youths held in those BIA detention facilities at both Ute Mountain Ute and Northern Cheyenne.

Now in addition to addressing those immediate issues, we must also develop a strategic approach to the long term issues of violence that affect children in Indian Country.

So, we've augmented the work of the federal working group with this advisory committee of experts who dedicated themselves to improving the lives of children in Native nations and Native communities.

Over the next year, this advisory committee will travel throughout the country holding hearings and listening sessions just like todays. They will go to Phoenix, they will go to Ft. Lauderdale, they'll go to Alaska, they will comb through the research and consult with others to help us paint a clear picture of what the incidents of violence among Native children looks like, and it will help us to identify ways to prevent it.
And next fall, this advisory committee's work will culminate in a final report, a strategic plan of action that will guide practitioners and policymakers at all levels, folks like me, and like the work of the Defending Childhood Task Force, the recommendations of this advisory committee will not sit on a shelf collecting dust. I think as you heard the Attorney General say in his video greeting this morning, the work of this advisory committee will really serve as a blueprint that will help guide us into the future.

So, this is our charge and our challenge. Today represents an important and an early step in protecting American Indian and Alaska Native children. For I think about this task force, I think about what the poet wrote so many years ago that perhaps this world is a world in which children suffer but maybe, just maybe, we can lessen the number of suffering children. And if we do not do this, then who will do this? That's what I think this task force is all about. No one here expects this work to be easy or that the efforts we embark on here will lead to a
panacea. But it is an investment. It's an investment in our children, an investment in the future of sovereign tribal nations on this continent. It's an investment that we fail to make at our own peril, and it's an investment whose return will not be measured in dollars and cents, but in the young smiles that you create and the doors of hope that you open and the futures that you will shape and in the lives that you will change.

So thank you and thank you for your dedication to this effort. Thank you.

JOANNE SHENANDOAH: Thank you very much for those kind and wonderful words and your dedication as well. I just want to remind people that we do have the safe room available if anyone wants to go there. And I just want to say to all the witnesses that we have been listening and I personally love the idea of cultural traditional aspects.

As you know, us Iroquois, have something in place called "The Great Law of Peace." And women had a lot to do with how to make decisions on what happens to perpetrators and what they did. And it's very