



American Indian Policy Institute

Arizona State University

POLICY ARTICLE

AIPI Policy Article:

Indigenous Legislators in Congress and Arizona

The November 6, 2018 election was historically significant for Indigenous candidates and voters. More than 100 candidates of Native American descent ran for public office before the primaries and more than half of them were women. Below, AIPI profiles the indigenous lawmakers in Congress and the Arizona State legislature.

Indigenous Peoples Elected to the 116th Congress

Representative Tom Cole (R-OK-4)



Photo Courtesy of cole.congress.gov

Congressman Cole has served eight succeeding terms in the House of Representatives since the 108th Congress. He obtained his Ph.D from the University of Oklahoma in 1984, an M.A. from Yale University in 1974, and a B.A. from Grinnell College in 1971. An enrolled member of the Chickasaw Nation, Cole has been honored for distinguished service on three occasions by the National Congress of American Indians.

Cole is recognized as a leader in the Republican party and is known for his firm conservative views. He has served as the chairman of the Oklahoma Republican Party (1985-1989), executive director of the National Republican Congressional Committee (1991-1993), and chief of staff for the Republican National Committee (1999-2001). He currently serves on the House Appropriations Committee (Subcommittee on Defense and Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies, ranking member) and is the ranking member on the House Rules Committee.

Representative Sharice Davids (D-KS-3)



Photo Courtesy of davids.house.gov

Congresswoman Davids is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation and a former Mixed Martial Arts fighter. She graduated from Cornell Law School (2010) and served as a White House Fellow under the Obama administration. She and Deb Halaand are the first Native American women to serve in Congress. Professionally, Davids has worked with a number of Tribes with a focus on community and economic development. She is intent on bringing opportunities to middle-class families. Congresswoman Davids is serving on the House Committee on Small Business and the Transportation and Infrastructure (Subcommittee on Aviation; Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings and Emergency Management; and Subcommittee on Highways and Transit).



Photo Courtesy of haaland.house.gov

Representative Deborah Haaland (D-NM-1)

Congresswoman Haaland is a member of the Laguna Pueblo people. She obtained her J.D. from the University of New Mexico School of Law in 2006. She and Sharice Davids are the first Native American women to serve in Congress. Haaland has a history of serving Democratic candidates and causes. In 2007, she graduated from Emerge New Mexico, a leadership training program aimed at increasing the number of Democratic party women in public office. She served full-time on Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign. In 2016, she traveled to the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to support the #NoDAPL movement. Haaland is focused on a progressive agenda, including fighting for Medicare-for-all, a \$15 minimum wage, and the Green New Deal. She also intends to bring greater national attention to the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) this year. Congresswoman Haaland is serving on the House Committee on Armed Services (Subcommittee on Military Personnel; Subcommittee on Readiness) and the House Natural Resources Committee (Chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands; Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States).



Photo Courtesy of mullin.house.gov/press-kit

Representative Markwayne Mullin (R-OK-2)

Congressman Mullin is known as a business owner and former Mixed Martial Arts fighter. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology (2010) and is enrolled in the Cherokee Nation. Mullin serves on the House Energy and Commerce Committee (Subcommittee on Environment and Climate Change; Subcommittee on Health; and Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations).

Indigenous Peoples Elected to the Arizona State 54th Legislature



Photo Courtesy of azleg.gov

Senator Sally Ann Gonzales (D-LD3)

Senator Gonzales is enrolled in the Pasqua Yaqui Tribe and was raised in the Yaqui community of Guadalupe, Arizona between Phoenix and Tempe. Her areas of emphasis include quality education, quality health care, women's rights, children's rights, and employee rights.

Gonzales is an educator with a bachelor's in Elementary Education from Arizona State University and a master's in Multicultural Education from the University of Arizona. She has worked as a teacher, teacher trainer, and education administrator. Senator Gonzales serves on the Commerce Committee, the Education Committee, and the Higher Education and Workforce Development Committee.



Photo Courtesy of azleg.gov

Senator Jamesita Peshlakai (D-LD7)

Senator Peshlakai is an experienced legislator, having previously served her district from the Arizona House of Representatives from 2013 – 2015. She holds a bachelor's degree in History and a master's degree in Educational Psychology from Northern Arizona University. She has worked for the Arizona Foundation for Women and Native Americans for Community Action. Peshlakai is a veteran of the Persian Gulf War, where she served with the U.S. Army. In 2016, she worked with Navajo Nation leadership to establish an independent Veterans Administration within the Navajo Nation Office of the President. Senator Peshlakai serves on the Committee for Higher Education and Workforce Development, the Natural Resources and Energy Committee, and the Transportation and Public Safety Committee. Her clans are Tangle People, Red House, Bitter Water, and Cliff Dweller.



Photo Courtesy of azleg.gov

Senator Victoria Steele (D-LD9)

Senator Steele is of German and Seneca (Mingo) descent. The Seneca people are one of the six tribes of the Iroquois Confederacy. Steele is originally from Pennsylvania but has lived in Arizona for more than 25 years. Senator Steele has a master's degree in counseling/psychology and spent more than 25 years in television and radio news. She is a life coach specializing in healthy relationships and is a co-founder of the Tucson chapter of the National Organization for Women. Steele previously served in the Arizona House of Representatives from 2012 to 2016. She currently serves on the Agriculture and Water Committee, the Senate Ethics Committee, the Government Committee, and is the ranking Democrat on the Health and Human Services Committee.

Representative Arlando Teller (D-LD7)

Representative Teller graduated from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in 1995. He has worked as an airport planner for Sky Harbor International Airport and transportation planner for the state of California. For the past ten years, he has worked for the Navajo Division of Transportation, where he is the Deputy Division Director. Teller serves on the Transportation Committee and the Committee on Land & Agriculture. Teller is Navajo and represents Arizona's Legislative District 7, which includes the Navajo Nation. He is from the Canyon de Chelly area. His clans are Naasht'ézhi-Táchii'nii (Zuni clan adopted into Red Running Into the Water People clan), Tó'aheedliinii (The Water Flows Together clan), Tódich'ii'nii (Bitter Water clan), and 'Áshijhi (Salt People clan).

Representative Myron Tsosie (D-LD7)

Representative Tsosie is Navajo and represents Arizona's Legislative District 7, which includes the Navajo Nation. He lives in Chinle. He has worked extensively in education administration within the Navajo Nation. He serves on the committees for Military & Veterans Affairs Member; Natural Resources, Energy & Water; and State & International Affairs. Tsosie earned a bachelor's in Public Administration from Northern Arizona University in 2016 and is working on a master's in Organizational Leadership, also from NAU. According to his website, he believes in community building and data-informed decision-making. His clans are Coyote Pass Clan, Towering House, Towering House, and Water Flows Together People.

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