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POLICY ARTICLE

AIPI Policy Article: Indigenous Legislators

Elected in 2020 to Serve in the 117th Congress & 55th Arizona Legislature

By Erin Granillo-Walker

The November 3, 2020 election was an historic election for Indigenous representation, featuring a record number of Indigenous candidates seeking office. In addition to the record-breaking class of elected representatives listed below, Paulette Jordan (D, ID-Senate), Rudy Soto (D, ID-01), and Tricia Zunker (D, WI-07) were nominees for their respective districts/states.

Indigenous Peoples Elected in 2020 to 117th Congress



Photo courtesy of Cole for Congress

Representative Tom Cole (R-OK-04)

Representative Cole was first elected to Congress in 2002 and is a member of the Chickasaw Nation. Prior to his election to Congress, he served as Chair of the Republican Party of Oklahoma, Oklahoma Secretary of State, Republican National Committee Chief of Staff, and State Senator. Congressman Cole sits on the Committee on Appropriations, where he is the vice ranking member, and the Committee on Rules where he is the ranking member. He is well known nationally as a Republican party leader and highly conservative representative. Additionally, he serves the Congressional Native American Caucus Co-Chair.



Photo Courtesy of davids.house.gov

Representative Sharice Davids (D-KS-03)

Representative Davids was first elected to Congress in 2018 and is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation. She represents the greater Kansas City, KS area. Prior to her election to Congress, Davids was a White House fellow and a mixed martial artist. She is the first openly LGBTQ+ Native American elected to Congress and the first woman of color to represent Kansas at the federal level. Rep. Davids sits on the Committees on Small Business and Transportation and Infrastructure; she is Co-Chair of the New Democrat Coalition Technology Task Force.

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U.S. News & World Report, 6 years, 2016-2021





Photo Courtesy of
haaland.house.gov

Representative Debra Haaland (D-NM-01)

Congresswoman Debra “Deb” Haaland was first elected to represent New Mexico in 2018 and is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna. She is the former chair of the New Mexico Democratic Party and was its nominee for Lieutenant Governor in 2014. Haaland sits on the Committee on Natural Resources in the House, where she is the Vice Chair, and the Committee on Armed Services. Alongside Rep. Cole, Haaland is the Congressional Native American Caucus Co-Chair. Rep. Haaland is being vetted for the Secretary of the Interior by President-Elect Biden.



Photo courtesy of Indian
Country today

Representative-elect Yvette Herrell (R-NM-02)

Yvette Herrell is the Representative-elect for New Mexico’s 2nd Congressional district covering Southern New Mexico. She is a member of the Cherokee Nation. Herrell was the 2018 nominee for the same district and won a rematch in 2020 against Democratic Rep. Xochitl Torres Small. Herrell formerly served in the New Mexico House of Representatives (representing district 51) from 2011 to 2018 and is also a small business owner. During her time at the New Mexico House of Representatives, Herrell was known nationally for her conservative viewpoints.

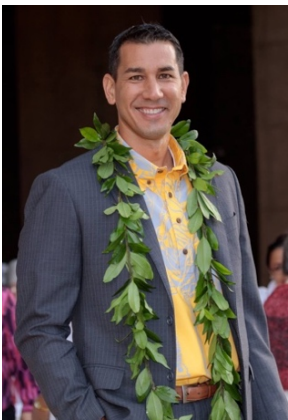


Photo courtesy of Kahele for
Congress

Representative-elect Kai Kahele (D-HI-02)

Kaiali’i (Kai) Kahele is the Representative-elect for Hawaii’s 2nd district. He will be filling the open seat left by outgoing Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard. Kahele is a Native Hawaiian and will be Hawaii’s first member of Congress from outside of Oahu (island home to Honolulu). Kahele is the current Majority Floor Leader of the Hawai’i State Senate; he was appointed to serve out the term of his late father in 2016. Since his appointment, Kahele was reelected by the constituents of the 1st State Senate district in 2016 and 2018. He is also pilot and a veteran of the U.S. Air Force, where he logged over 2000 hours of military flight time and is a commissioned officer in the Hawai’i Air National Guard.

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

Representative Markwayne Mullin (R-OK-02)

Representative Mullin was first elected to Congress in 2012, succeeding longtime Democrat Rep. Dan Boren. He is a member of the Cherokee Nation and represents much of Eastern Oklahoma. Prior to his election to Congress, he was a small business owner and mixed martial arts fighter. He is known nationally for his conservative views and close alliance with the President. In Congress, Mullin sits on the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Indigenous Peoples Elected in 2020 to the Arizona 55th Legislature

State Senate



Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Senator Sally Ann Gonzales (D-03)

Senator Gonzales is a member of the Pasqua Yaqui Tribe was first elected to the Arizona state Senate in 2018. She previously served in the Arizona House from 1997-2000 and 2011-2018. She also served on the Pascua Yaqui Tribal Council for four years. Senator Gonzales sits on the Committees on Commerce, Education, and Higher Education and Workforce Development. She represents the Western side of Tucson and its metropolitan area. Senator Gonzales was on the study committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2020.



Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Senator Jamescita Peshlakai (D-07)

Senator Peshlakai is a member of the Navajo Nation and represents much of Northeastern Arizona. She previously served in the Arizona House. Senator Peshlakai is a member of the Committees on Natural Resources and Energy, Transportation and Public Safety, and Higher Education and Workforce Development. She is a U.S. Army combat veteran having served in the Persian Gulf War. Senator Peshlakai sat on the study committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2020.



Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Senator Victoria Steele (D-07)

Senator Steele was elected to the Arizona state Senate in 2018 after previously having served in the Arizona House for two terms. Her district includes much of urban Tucson and the greater University of Arizona community. She is of Seneca /Mingo descent and served on the study committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2020. In the State Senate, she serves on the Committees on Government, Health and Human Services, Ethics, and Water and Agriculture.

State House



Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Representative Jennifer Jermaine (D-18)

Representative Jermaine was first elected to the Arizona House in 2018 and represents parts of Ahwatukee, Chandler, Mesa, and Tempe. Jermaine is White Earth Ojibwe. She sponsored Arizona's House Bill 2570 in 2019 which established a legislative committee to collect data on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. She chaired the study committee that produced the legislative report released in November 2020. She serves on the Government Committee, Elections Reform Committee, and the Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

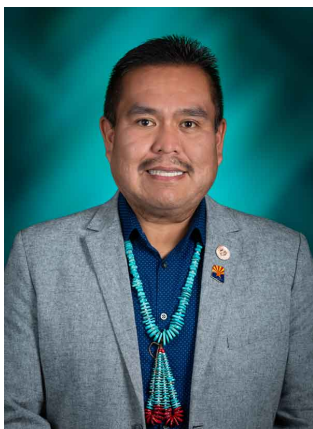


Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Representative Myron Tsosie (D-07)

Representative Tsosie represents much of the Navajo Nation and Northeastern Arizona and is the seatmate of Senator Peshlakai and Representative Teller. He was first elected to the state legislature in 2018. He serves on the Natural Resources, Energy and Water Committee, Land and Agriculture Committee, and State and International Affairs Committee. He also served on the study Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2020.

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Photo courtesy of
azleg.gov

Representative Arlando Teller (D-07)

Representative Teller was first elected in 2018; he is the seatmate of Senator Peshlakai and Representative Tsoosie in Northeastern Arizona. Rep. Teller serves on the Committee on Land and Agriculture, as well as the Transportation Committee. He was a member of Arizona's study Committee on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2020.

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