



Indian Country Welcomes a Historic New Congress

by Ernest L. Stevens, Jr.

Indian Country just experienced a national mid-term election that has the potential to shape the next generation of tribal leaders. The 116th Congress is set to convene on January 3, 2019, and while the national news is focused on the change in leadership at the House of Representatives, for the first time in history, not one, but two Native American women will take their seats amongst 435 Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and 100 Members of the U.S. Senate. Although they are the first two Native women to serve in Congress, Native women have always played a key role in leadership in Indian Country as balanced decision making between the genders has always been an important cultural value since time immemorial.

Representatives-elect Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo, D-NM-01) and Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk Nation, D-KS-03) will serve as the first Native American women in the House of Representatives. Both of these incredibly strong Native women have persevered, worked hard and gained the confidence of their constituents, and bring an incredible story to our Nation's

Capitol. I encourage everyone to read the life stories of these Native women and what it means for Indian Country to finally have elected Representatives in Washington, D.C.

As the new Congress is sworn-in, they will take a solemn vow to uphold this country's constitutional principles, which includes the distinct sovereign status of Indian tribes as separate governments within our federalist system. In addition, they will swear to uphold the hundreds of treaties and federal laws that together establish solemn obligations to Indian tribes and our citizens.

The Honorable Ms. Haaland and Ms. Davids will join Reps Tom Cole (R-OK) (Chickasaw) and Markwayne Mullin (R-OK) (Cherokee) – these are historic highs for Native Americans serving in Congress. They will also join a total of 100 new members coming to Congress with diverse backgrounds serving as nurses, doctors, dentists, teachers, scientists, business leaders, professional athletes (two former NFL, one NHL, and one MMA fighter - Sharice Davids), and military veterans.

The National Indian Gaming Association and our Member Tribes are already at work reaching out and educating these more than 100 new members about the history and benefits of Indian gaming. We will share data and stories of how Indian gaming has revitalized our communities by accounting for more than 300,000 direct American jobs annually. Indian gaming generates tribal government revenue that has worked to improve Indian education, health care, public safety and other essential community services, as well as Indian Country infrastructure – building roads, water and communication systems, schools, health centers, community and cultural centers and much more.

Despite this amazing progress, Indian Country has faced obstacles in the past year. Tribal governments are still dealing with the unfair treatment under this country's labor laws after the Tribal Labor Sovereignty Act (TLSA) failed to garner 60 votes in the Senate. Indian Country was shut out of the historic tax cut bill passed this year, severely impacting economic development and opportunities on the reservation.

This Congress must do more to correct some of these injustices by amending federal labor, taxation, and other laws to better respect the governmental status of Indian tribes. And the Trump Administration must do more to meet its legal treaty and trust obligations to Native Nations and our citizens.

To ensure that we take full advantage of the opportunities that lie ahead in the 116th Congress and to continue our battle against ongoing threats, the National Indian Gaming Association encourages all of Indian Country to reach out and educate as many new Members of Congress as early in 2019 as possible. ♣

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