



Congressional Response **CONGRESSWOMAN DEB HAALAND**

NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS | 2020 STATE OF INDIAN NATIONS

Thank you all so much for giving me the opportunity to respond to President Fawn Sharpe's State of Indian Nations Address. My name is Deb Haaland. I am an enrolled citizen of the Laguna Pueblo, a single mom to my queer daughter Somah, a daughter of veterans, a grateful fighter for environmental and social justice, and the congresswoman for New Mexico's 1st Congressional District.

I'm proud to be here with all of you – confident about the new leadership here at NCAI and also frightened about division in our country and the fragility of our planet. I believe the best course forward is to communicate and to unite for the solutions that we all know we can find and implement together.

I want to thank my colleagues and in many cases my mentors, Chairman Raul Grijalva, Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples Chair Ruben Gallego, Native American Caucus Co-Chair Rep. Tom Cole; Native Caucus Chair Emeritus, Rep. Betty McCollum, Sharice Davids, Paul Cook and so many more, for all of their work and the support they have given to me personally and on behalf of their respective important committees.

The legislation that the House of Representatives has passed this past year reflects the diversity that increased when women won and flipped the US House across the country in the 2018 election, and the willingness of my colleagues to listen to tribes.

I'm so proud of your woman president. I'm confident that Fawn Sharpe will lead this Congress forward and champion the issues that we know are most important to all our communities.

Tribal Self-Governance is among those issues, and after all the centuries of Indian Tribes not having full say over our destinies, it's time for the US Congress to pass the PROGRESS Act which will provide further self-governance by Indian Tribes and will pave the way for them to manage programs and resources in the most effective ways.

I know that the Congress and past Administrations have not always done right by our communities, but TODAY, I accept the new call of accountability the US Congress owes to our people, and I will do all I can to champion the issues that will help Indian Country to thrive in all the areas of concern, and to use my seat to hold the President, his Administration, and federal agencies to account – because I took an oath and that is my constitutional duty.

I am also pleased to know that NCAI has chosen to honor my dear friend Senator Tom Udall from New Mexico, who has been a champion for tribes and also for our environment. His mentorship to many Native interns, fellows, and staff, and his work to bring indigenous voices to Capitol Hill will NEVER be forgotten.

It is also a tremendous honor for me to say the name of Marcella LeBeau; a leader who has consistently represented her people with grace and unyielding courage. Ms. LeBeau has served Indian Country, and our country in the Army Nurse Corps during World War 2, tending bedside in surgical tents while bombs dropped around her. She was awarded the French Legion of Honor, and her legacy, will be carried forward for generations to come.

In 2019 House Democrats managed the passage of over 400 pieces of legislation; over 250 were bipartisan. Republicans and Democrats work together to ensure that we are united on issues critical to Indian Country, and we're especially proud to have helped bring long-sought federal recognition to the Little Shell Tribe, but there is still a long way to go.

As the vice chair of the House Natural Resources Committee and the chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, I wake up each day with a fear that gnaws at my conscience, and that is the effects of climate change and how this crisis wreaks havoc on global communities who can least afford to adapt.

I'm happy to know that NCAI created the Climate Action Task Force so that Tribal nations are on the front line and ready to combat the effects of climate change on many levels.

The sad fact is that we have a president who is intent on selling off our public lands to his friends for fracking and drilling. We have a president who has used his power to cut the size of Bears Ears National Monument by 85% and the size of Grand Staircase Escalante by half. These two areas – the ancestral homelands of my people, is now open to leases and desecration by extractive industries, which will exacerbate climate change and destroy countless sacred sites and erase our history.

This administration, which is stacked with coal, gas, and oil insiders has stopped important climate change research and actively promotes the denial of climate change and our need to move our country to a renewable energy economy.

This is no different than the destruction of the Tohono O'odham Nation's sacred dance sites for the Trump border wall so he can further promote division in this country between people of color, and in the process destroy a living culture and an irreplaceable wildlife habitat.

But in spite of the immoral acts of this president and his administration toward our environment, the House passed bi-partisan legislation to protect a 10-mile radius around Chaco Canyon from gas and oil drilling. The bill is currently in the Senate, and I encourage all of you to support its passage.

Recently the president signed an executive order creating the Operation Lady Justice Task Force, a plan that is modeled after MY Not Invisible Act of 2019. Solving the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women is going to take a sustained, comprehensive effort between tribal, state, and federal governments, and I have concerns, because the task force does not include the voices of survivors or tribal leaders. It lacks concrete transparency and consultation requirements. If we are truly going to address this crisis we need the Administration to recognize the centuries of violence that Native people have endured, which won't be solved without concrete procedures and with only 1.5 million dollars.

In furtherance of his detrimental policies, the president is vehemently arguing for the federal court to allow him to kick off more than 700,000 people from Food Stamps. Many of these people reside in our

communities and in urban areas. This action is wrong, and as a former SNAP beneficiary, I understand the value to health that adequate food can mean to families living on the edge.

The work that we try to do in Indian Country is not helped when tribal leaders have to struggle to be heard. They deserve a say in deciding the policies that the administration hands down that affect tribal nations. We have seen this time and again. And that's why I support the RESPECT Act, which is bipartisan and bicameral legislation that would mandate tribal consultation across all federal agencies, and why I will work tirelessly to bring tribal leaders to the table to voice their concerns about proposed legislation, and why I worked to pass a tribal consultation amendment in the National Defense Authorization Act.

While President Obama held Tribal Nations Summits every year of his presidency, there has been little to no formal interaction with the needs of tribes by this administration. While tribes were against the Department of the Interior reorganization, it carried no weight and tribes were ignored.

If we think for a moment about the Obama presidency, and the fact that he moved more land into trust than any president, we can see a stark contrast between President Obama and this president. My office is open to all tribes, and I'd like to find solutions to the lack of the Interior Department's work on land into trust issues and reports of paperwork languishing without needed signatures leading to tribes' frustration.

But some hope looms in our ability to move legislation forward in a bipartisan way.

I'll start with draft legislation that I've worked on along with Senator Elizabeth Warren. Honoring Promises to Native Nations act is draft legislation that is currently gaining comments from tribes across the country. This legislation will seek to remedy the decades-long underfunding that was exposed in the United States Commission on Civil Rights' Broken Promises Report. The legislation will address chronic underfunding and neglect by the federal government in 5 major areas: Criminal Justice and Public Safety, Healthcare, Education, Housing, and Economic Development.

There is also Missing and Murdered Indigenous People and violence prevention legislation that will begin to untangle the centuries-long affliction that has taken hold and that must be remedied. I have sponsored and co-sponsored 8 bills that if passed will move us toward finding solutions. Among these is the BADGES Act, which will streamline the hiring of law enforcement officers in Indian Country, and the Not Invisible Act of 2019, that was the first bill in history to be introduced by 4 tribally enrolled members of Congress.

Currently, there are a number of bills in the Senate that need to move forward.

Likely the most important bill to pass right now is the Violence Against Women Act of 2019. The House is pushing the Senate to move the bipartisan bill that we passed in April of 2019 so that it can be signed into law, because women have the right to be safe.

In May, the House passed the "Clean Carcieri fix," that Rep. Tom Cole introduced, to allow the Interior to take land into trust for Tribes that were federally recognized at any point in time—not just when the Indian Reorganization Act was signed in 1934. This bill is important for the Senate to move forward because Congress did not intend to limit Tribes' land into trust rights based on the date of their federal recognition.

There are two extremely important issues that are critical to 2020: The Census and the general election.

I urge every tribe across this country to do all it can to ensure that our people are counted in this year's census. Funding that is important to the future of our communities is on the line if we neglect to be counted. It is especially challenging in states deemed "hard to count" by the census bureau; however, a commitment to make the census a priority, will ensure that Indian Country doesn't leave funding that will make a positive difference in the lives of our children on the table.

Last, this is an election year. As an organizer for close to 2 decades, I understand the challenges in getting our people to vote, but this is the most important election of our lifetime. I take my oath of office to heart, and defending our constitution and our democracy is my most important charge as a member of congress.

I have witnessed actions that I never thought possible by a president of the united states, and those actions, coupled with the brutal contempt for our environment, and most dangerous policies that have ripped families apart – based only on the country of their origin. The president's disdain for decency and respect of human beings and our institutions are untenable, and I urge Indian Country to devote every possible resource to electing a president who reflects the values that define us.

Those values instilled in us by our parents and grandparents – the values that guide our principled existence and demand that we care about our whole communities – not just ourselves; that we give our children every opportunity so that they are prepared to keep our customs and traditions and then pass them on; the values that require us to protect and defend the land that is everything, because it has sustained us for this long.

Tribal leaders, please budget funds for the purpose of getting your people out to vote, because our future depends on it.

I thank you for listening. It's been an honor to spend this time with you.