

Rep. Deb Haaland Confirmation Toolkit



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Introduction

On December 17, 2020, Then-President Elect Joseph R. Biden nominated Representative Deb Haaland to lead the U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) as its 54th Secretary.

Representative Haaland, a citizen of the Pueblo of Laguna, a 35th-generation New Mexican, and one of the first Native women to serve in the House of Representatives, is immensely qualified to serve her country as Interior Secretary. Interior has a unique fiduciary obligation to tribal nations, and it is critical that Interior leadership and employees reflect the communities it serves.

Week of Action Schedule

Monday, February 22, 2021

- [#DebForInterior Town Hall on Facebook Live >](#)
- [Premiere: History of Interior Mini-Documentary](#)
- [Contact Your Senators >](#)

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

- [Confirmation Hearing Watch Party >](#)
Watch the Senate's Energy and Natural Resources confirmation hearing. We will have surprise guests, commentary, and giveaways!
- [Tweetstorm: Tell the Senate to Confirm #DebForInterior >](#)

Wednesday, February 24, 2021

- [Share Why You Support Deb](#)
- [Contact Your Senators >](#)

Talking Points

Deb Haaland has a record of working with both sides of the aisle to get things done.

- Introduced the most bills with bipartisan cosponsors compared to all House Freshmen in 2019.
- Worked with Senators on both sides of the aisle to deliver COVID-19 funding for Tribes.
- Respectfully gave colleagues on both sides of the aisle equal time to deliberate and debate during her subcommittee’s hearings.
- Built meaningful relationships with Republican House and Senate members to seek common ground on outdoor recreation, missing and murdered Indigenous women, and military housing protections.

Deb Haaland is a voice that our country needs to address economic recovery.

- Haaland is not a part of the political elite, and instead has humble beginnings and truly understands the struggles that families in every part of the country face.
- Haaland understands what it’s like to be a small business owner in a tough economy, and will ensure all voices have a seat at the table in policy-making decisions.
- Haaland cares about every job and knows that families across the country are worried about putting food on the table, raising their children, and paying the bills.

Deb Haaland cares about rural communities.

- Throughout her career, Haaland spent time with families in rural, agricultural, and ranching communities.
- Haaland worked to deliver rural broadband initiatives, to include family farms in COVID-19 relief, and increase access to health care in rural areas far from cities.

Haaland has the experience to lead the Department of Interior.

- Through her work as Vice-Chair of the Natural Resources Committee and the Chair of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands, Haaland shepherded key bipartisan legislation through the U.S. House including the historic Public Lands package in 2019 and the
- Great American Outdoors Act in 2020.
- Haaland is familiar and works with local communities, Tribes, stakeholders, outdoor recreation groups, hunters, anglers, and conservation groups on policy issues within the jurisdiction of the interior, including the maintenance backlog, the outdoor recreation economy, and Tribal consultation.


Haaland will make sure Western priorities are represented.

- As a westerner herself, Haaland understands the West and the relationship between the Department of the Interior and western states.
- As a Pueblo woman, Haaland comes from a family who hunts, farms and ranches – and will keep those interests in mind at the Department of Interior.

Haaland is a team player and will be a partner to ensure access to public lands, build economic opportunity through the Department, and showcase the beauty that the United States has to offer.

Social Media Graphics

Week of Action Schedule: Twitter >



#DEBFORINTERIOR WEEK OF ACTION

MON 2/22 TOWN HALL ON FACEBOOK LIVE PREMIERE: HISTORY OF INTERIOR MINI-DOCUMENTARY CONTACT YOUR SENATORS	TUES 2/23 CONFIRMATION HEARING WATCH PARTY TWEETSTORM: TELL THE SENATE TO CONFIRM #DEBFORINTERIOR	WEDS 2/24 SHARE WHY YOU SUPPORT DEB CONTACT YOUR SENATORS
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Week of Action Schedule: Instagram >




#DEBFORINTERIOR
WEEK OF ACTION

MONDAY 2/22
#DEBFORINTERIOR Town Hall on Facebook Live
Premiere: History of Interior Mini-Doc
Contact Your Senators

TUESDAY 2/23
Confirmation Hearing Watch Party
Tweetstorm: Tell the Senate to Confirm #Debforinterior

WEDNESDAY 2/24
Share Why You Support Deb
Contact Your Senators

Town Hall: Instagram >



#DEBFORINTERIOR
TOWN HALL
MONDAY 2:22 / 5PM EST
FACEBOOK LIVE
FEATURING

RINKU SEN
Executive Director, Narrative Initiative

CHIEF EXECUTIVE MELANIE BENJAMIN
Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe

HOP HOPKINS
Director of Organizational Transformation, Sierra Club

JULIA BERNAL
Alliance Director, Pueblo Action Alliance

RAYE ZARAGOZA
Singer-Songwriter

Town Hall Today: Instagram >



#DEBFORINTERIOR
TOWN HALL
TODAY / 5PM EST
FACEBOOK LIVE
FEATURING

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Executive Director, Narrative Initiative


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RAYE ZARAGOZA
Singer-Songwriter

TweetStorm Today: Twitter >



#DEBFORINTERIOR TWEET STORM
TODAY: 9AM EST-12PM EST
TELL @ENERGYDEMS AND @ENERGYGOP
TO CONFIRM #DEBFORINTERIOR

TweetStorm Today: Instagram >



#DEBFORINTERIOR
TWEET STORM
TODAY
9AM EST-12PM EST

TWEET
@ENERGYDEMS
@ENERGYGOP
TELL THEM TO
CONFIRM
#DEBFORINTERIOR

[Tell the Senate: Twitter >](#)



[Tell the Senate: Instagram >](#)



Letters of Support

- [Letter of Support from the National Congress of American Indians](#)

Op Ed Template

We have made an Op Ed sample for supporters of Representative Haaland's confirmation to use as a guide, and to submit to media outlets across the country. When using the template, swap out language to include your unique perspective, and opinions about her worthiness for the role.

[Download Op-Ed Template >](#)

Letter Template

January [XX], 2021

The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
306 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

[Or insert contact information for your Nations' Senator]

RE: Supporting Confirmation of Representative Deb Haaland as 54th Secretary of the Department of the Interior

Dear Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and Members of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources:

On behalf of [Your Tribal Nation], I write in support of the confirmation of Representative Deb Haaland as Secretary of the Department of the Interior. [Insert short introduction/background to your Nation]. The United States must uphold its responsibility to tribal nations, honor its treaties, and provide a voice for Indian Country in the federal government. It is with this responsibility in mind and with tremendous enthusiasm that [Your Tribal Nation] urges you to confirm President Joseph R. Biden's nomination of Rep. Haaland to lead the Department of the Interior.

The U.S. Department of the Interior (Interior) carries out a broad range of responsibilities, including the management of public lands, water resources, minerals, wildlife management, and cultural heritage preservation. Additionally, it is charged and entrusted with upholding the federal trust and treaty responsibilities to the 574 tribal nations and more than 5.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives. The day-to-day decisions of Interior impact all aspects of tribal sovereignty and self-governance, from education to economic development to law enforcement. As a result of this unique fiduciary obligation to tribal nations, it is critical that Interior leadership and employees reflect the communities it serves. American Indians and Alaska Natives have long

served the United States in the military and more increasingly in local, state, and federal leadership. **[If your Nation passed a resolution or other official document supporting the nomination of Rep. Haaland, describe it here. If not, an example of a member that has, or currently engaged in public leadership. If neither of these are options, consider striking the sentence about military service and providing background about your close interactions with Interior and its impact].**

President Biden’s nominee Rep. Haaland is a citizen of the Pueblo of Laguna, a 35th-generation New Mexican, and one of the first Native women to serve in the House of Representatives. She is immensely qualified to serve our country as the 54th Secretary of the Interior. In the 116th Congress, Rep. Haaland introduced more bills with bipartisan co-sponsorship than any other freshman legislator in 2019. Additionally, she served as Co-Chair of the House Native American Caucus; Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Natural Resources; Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forest, and Public Lands; and as a member of the Indigenous Peoples Subcommittee and the House Armed Services Committee. Her House leadership in shepherding a bipartisan public lands package in 2019 and the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020 illustrates her commitment to the stewardship of the nation’s resources and directly correlates with the duties and responsibilities of the Secretary of Interior.

As a Westerner, Rep. Haaland spent a great deal of time with families in tribal, rural, agricultural, and ranching communities. As such, she understands their diverse social, economic, and cultural needs. During her service in Congress, Rep. Haaland demonstrated this keen understanding through her success in passing bills addressing business development, public lands and resource management, infrastructure, and increasing access to rural broadband and health care. Rep. Haaland cares about every job and understands deeply the concerns that too many families have about putting food on their tables.

For tribal communities, Rep. Haaland has been a champion for public safety and justice. For example, she played an instrumental role in the passage of Savanna’s Act and the Not Invisible Act of 2019. The latter bill was the first to be sponsored by four Native members of Congress, Republican and Democrat, to address the crisis of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) by bringing together law enforcement, tribal leaders, federal partners, and survivors. Also, in her role as Co-Chair of the House Native American Caucus, Rep. Haaland helped ensure tribal inclusion in COVID-19 emergency relief legislation in a nonpartisan manner. **[Feel free to expand on this paragraph, if relevant]**

Rep. Haaland has also been a proponent of energy production and related job development to support sustainable economies and advance our nation’s resource independence. **[Insert example of your Nations’ experience with traditional or renewable energy development. If this is not an option, consider including an example that speaks to the importance of another bill introduced by Representative Haaland. You can find a list of her sponsored legislation [HERE](#). Alternatively, you could write more poignantly about what Rep. Haaland’s confirmation means**

to your tribe]. We are confident in Rep. Haaland's ability to serve the diverse needs both inside and outside of Indian Country.

In conclusion, the **[Your Tribal Nation]** asks you to support the confirmation of Rep. Haaland as Secretary of Interior. She has extensive experience, exemplary qualifications, and a demonstrated commitment to public service. Rep. Haaland's record of legislative successes showcases that she will continue to bring pragmatism and bipartisanship to the performance of her responsibilities as Interior Secretary. As a Native woman, Rep. Haaland descends from people who have hunted, farmed, managed, and cared for our nation's lands since time immemorial. She understands deeply that these landscapes are multipurpose and integral to sustaining many communities, economies, and cultures.

It is our honor to support Rep. Haaland in this historic role, and on behalf of **[Your Tribal Nation]**, I ask that you swiftly confirm Rep. Haaland as Interior Secretary.

Sincerely,

[Your name and official title]

Articles

'Our ancestors' dreams come true': Deb Haaland could become the nation's most powerful Native American leader

Marco della Cava and Deborah Barfield Berry | USA TODAY

Published February 7, 2021

More than a dozen years ago, Alvin Warren's phone rang. He was handling Indian affairs for New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson and knew all the key people in his field.

"She said her name was Deb Haaland," Warren recalled. "I'd never heard of her."

Haaland was volunteering for the presidential campaign of a senator named Barack Obama, and she wanted Warren to travel to the Laguna Pueblo, the Native American enclave Haaland hailed from, to speak to locals about the election's importance.

When Warren arrived, he found potluck food and 20 people. Haaland apologized for the low turnout. He waved her off, impressed by the unknown activist's embrace of grassroots politics and tireless work ethic.

Fast forward since then and the number of people who have heard of Haaland has grown exponentially. Now that same political savvy she used to mobilize Native voters in 2008 for a victorious Obama may help her once again make history.

If Haaland, 60, is confirmed next month as President Joe Biden's next Interior Secretary, the Democrat New Mexico congresswoman, who took office in 2019, will become not just the most powerful Native American politician in the nation, but also the first one to run a department whose centuries of broken promises and benign neglect has contributed to the slow erosion of Indigenous culture.

Deb Haaland, a second-term congresswoman from New Mexico, may soon become the first Native American to be secretary of the Interior, a position that traditionally has held negative sway over Indian country. Native activists are hopeful Haaland's confirmation leads to changes for the nearly 600 federal tribes across the United States.

The Cabinet post requires balancing the competing needs of disparate factions, including energy companies looking to extract mineral rights, conservation groups hoping to preserve the national parks, and, significantly, Native activists who will look to Haaland's oversight of the department's

Bureau of Indian Affairs to help fix inadequate healthcare, poor education and crumbling infrastructure.

Native American hopes already are soaring.

"The history of federal Indian policy has been a history of people who had no idea what was best for us," said Warren, who works on Native education issues for the non-profit Los Alamos National Laboratory Foundation in Española, New Mexico. "To have someone in that position who has lived our experience, who knows the beauty of our culture, of our family traditions, of our struggles, you can't overstate the impact of that."

Alicia Ortega, founder of Albuquerque-based advocacy group Native Women Lead, said simply, "It's our ancestors' dreams come true."

South Carolina Rep. James Clyburn, the House majority whip making history as the highest-ranking African American in Congress, pushed Biden to nominate Haaland, arguing for the historical importance of having a Native American at Interior.

"It was time to break that ceiling," he said.

Haaland senses the magnitude of the moment.

"A voice like mine has never been a Cabinet secretary or at the head of the Department of the Interior," she tweeted after her nomination. "It's profound to think about the history of this country's policies to exterminate Native Americans and the resilience of our ancestors that gave me a place here today."

Haaland declined an interview with USA TODAY before her confirmation hearing, but conversations with nearly two dozen friends, peers and critics tell a fundamentally American story whose cinematic arc defies the elitist cliches that often shadow lawmakers.

Haaland has a hardscrabble, mixed-race, military-family backstory that includes working as a baker after high school and, later, selling salsa from her car to make ends meet. Four days after graduating college at age 33, she gave birth to her only child, daughter Somáh, who is now an activist in her own right supporting Native and LGBTQ causes.

The single mother struggled financially, bunking with friends when money ran short. Then in her 40s and 50s, self-realization: personal passions such as cooking and long-distance running mixed with increasingly important political roles that led to Congress, where she may well be among few lawmakers still paying off up to \$50,000 in student loan debt.

Friends describe a woman with both a huge appetite for life and a natural gift for politics who cares deeply, whether it's mentoring young people of color, collecting food for the homeless or fighting for civil rights causes.

"She's not in it for the fame or the glory," said New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham. "She's in it to see real results."

From selling salsa to the halls of Congress

Debra Anne Haaland, known as Deb, was born December 2, 1960, in Winslow, Arizona. A military brat and one of five children, Haaland attended 13 public schools around the country before settling in New Mexico.

Haaland's sense of service was seeded by her parents. Her mother, Mary Toya, was in the Navy and worked as a federal employee in Indian education, while her father, John David, also known as J.D. and "Dutch," was a 30-year Marine who was awarded the Silver Star for saving six lives in Vietnam.

Although Haaland is proud of her father's Norwegian heritage — The Norwegian American trumpeted her 2018 Congressional win with the headline "Norwegian American Deb Haaland makes history" — her mother's Pueblo Indian roots are foundational to her identity and were reflected in the elaborate turquoise, black and red outfit Haaland wore for her swearing-in ceremony.

There are upward of 600 Native American federally and state-recognized tribes around the United States and two dozen of them are made up of Pueblo enclaves scattered across New Mexico.

Many Native Americans were marched at gunpoint by federal troops off their land and onto reservations that held no historical meaning. But Pueblo Indians have a history of resistance — including the infamous Pueblo Revolt in 1680 that temporarily chased the Spanish from New Mexico — that has kept them on ancestral lands for the past 7,000 years. Haaland often says she is a 35th generation New Mexican.

A combination of a duty to serve and a dedication to her people quickly came to define Haaland's life.

Although Haaland was an English major, political science professor Fred Harris, who led the Democratic National Committee in the late '60s and ran for president in the early '70s, sensed a like minded soul when they met in his politics class at the University of New Mexico.

“You could tell right away this was a very smart and very committed person,” said Harris, who successfully convinced Haaland to apply to law school a few years later.

More lean times followed as she worked her way through graduate school doing a variety of jobs, including making and selling Pueblo Salsa. At one particularly dire juncture, she and Somáh were sharing a two-bedroom apartment with a roommate when financial concerns led them to move out and find shelter with friends.

After she graduated from the University of New Mexico Law School in 2006, Haaland's political activism took wing, leading to steady jobs that eased her financial worries.

After volunteering for Obama's first campaign by getting out the Native vote, she landed top jobs at both the Laguna and San Felipe Pueblos, where she oversaw tribal gaming and implemented environmentally friendly business practices such as recycling. In 2012, she helped Obama win re-election as the state's vote director for Native Americans, and then served as Native caucus chair for the state Democratic party.

Haaland's horizons, once clouded by financial and housing insecurity, were becoming as vast and inviting as the great desert plains of her home state.

Why run for office? 'Why not?'

In 2014 came the bold step: Haaland decided to run for New Mexico lieutenant governor alongside gubernatorial hopeful and state Attorney General Gary King. Native activist Warren, who stayed in touch with Haaland after their meeting at the Laguna Pueblo, remembers asking her why she had decided to run for a state leadership post.

Haaland looked at Warren and said simply, "Why not?"

"That struck me," said Warren. "So many of us, especially Native women, have had the message delivered to us that we aren't the ones who run for office. But Deb said 'I won't let that restrict me.'"

It is a message she has been keen to pass along to a new generation of activists. While running for lieutenant governor, Haaland received an email from a college student who was inspired by

seeing a Native American woman aiming for high office. The student, Paulene Abeyta, asked how she could help.

Haaland replied immediately. “She told me, ‘You can run for office, too,’ So I did,” said Abeyta, who went on to win a school board seat. She is now a third-year law student at the University of Arizona and president of the National Native American Law School Students Association.

“There’s tons of us she’s inspired, she’s awakened,” said Abeyta, who is Navajo.

Haaland lost her bid for lieutenant governor, but instead of retreating she successfully set her sights on leading the state's Democratic Party. The two-year term started in 2015, a job that often found her visiting the state's 33 geographically distant counties to increase Democratic voter rolls alongside vice-chair Juan Sanchez.

Haaland's passion for the state and its deep Native history was always on display. “We couldn’t drive past a hill or a mountain without her telling me the significance of it to her people,” said Sanchez.

He also bore witness to her kindness toward strangers, something often observed by the congresswoman's friends. One cross-state trip started at 4 a.m., and by the time the pair stopped at a filling station in the town of Truth or Consequences, they were famished.

As gas filled the tank, Haaland stocked up on Cheez-Its and Chex Mix.

"I was so excited to eat," Sanchez recalled. “As we pulled out, we saw a guy with a sign, ‘Hungry, anything helps.’ Deb stopped, gave him all our food and four hours later we finally ate. That’s just who she is.”

Haaland's dedicated work across New Mexico did not go unnoticed. Lujan Grisham remains impressed by the way Haaland took the state’s Democratic party “and rebuilt it and cemented a platform for success that continues to this day.”

Much like Stacey Abrams' groundbreaking work in Georgia for the Democrats, Haaland is credited with helping members of her party regain New Mexico's House of Representatives and secretary of state posts in 2016.

In 2018, she ran against five Democrats in the state's 1st Congressional District, which is 68% white. With a progressive platform that included Medicare-for-all, \$15 minimum wage and renewable energy, she won 40% of the vote. She then handily beat Republican counterpart Janice Arnold-Jones for the congressional seat — in doing so becoming only the second Native

American woman in Congress after Kansas Democrat Sharice Davids, who hails from Wisconsin's Ho-Chunk Nation.

Last fall, Haaland's campaign efforts helped her handily win again, helped by the blue tide that surged in reaction to the presidency of Donald Trump. In a few Instagram posts last fall under the name CoffeeQueer, daughter Somáh shared photos of her mother washing the family dogs ahead of Election Day.

"You guys, my mom is working so hard every single day," she wrote of her mother's campaign fundraising efforts. "On top of all this she somehow finds time to do things like cook dinner and bake cakes and gives the pups a trim. She genuinely cares so much and she would do absolutely anything for her community."

Haaland can train a spotlight on Native issues

On Capitol Hill, Haaland has become known as someone who will not be ignored.

"She's very, very respectful and pleasant to work with, but she wasn't going to wait for her turn to speak up," said Florida Rep. Lois Frankel, co-chair of the Democratic Women's Caucus, where Haaland is caucus vice-chair.

"She's one of those who is willing to listen to people, to work across the aisle," Frankel added. "She's not a flamethrower."

Haaland supported the bipartisan Great American Outdoor Act, which among other things provided money for the Land and Water Conservation Fund and funds maintenance backlog at national parks. She also was co-sponsor of the bipartisan Not Invisible Act of 2019, which aimed to reduce violent crime on Native American lands and against Native Americans.

Last spring, as the novel coronavirus began to ravage healthcare-challenged Native American communities, Haaland pushed to improve broadband service on reservations, eliminate some bureaucratic red tape for access to federal aid and address concerns about the lack of running water on some reservations.

"We just have ignored or neglected certain communities of color along the way and it's come to this," she told USA TODAY in an interview last April. "Indian country has been left behind for decades."

If Haaland becomes the nation's next Interior secretary, many Native American leaders say that she will face great expectations tempered by the historical reality.

“We know these problems we’ve had with the federal government can’t be solved overnight, because they’ve been going on for 400 years,” said Fawn Sharp, president of the National Congress of American Indians and Quinault Tribal Nation in Washington State.

Judith LeBlanc, director of the Native Organizers Alliance, a national political organizing group, said Haaland’s big tasks will include helping Native Americans deal with the disproportionate COVID-19 virus sickening and killing people of color, who are three times more likely to die than white Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. She also has a chance to “reset the relationship” between Indigenous people and the Interior Department, LeBlanc said.

But the voices looking to bend her ear will be many, including conservation groups, ranchers, hunters and fishermen and mining companies. “Every environmentalist would love this job, but it comes with an incredible number of challenges,” said Athan Manuel, director of the Sierra Club’s land protection program.

Haaland's task will be a giant balancing act, often weighing her own passion for environmental issues with the financial realities of many stakeholders —including some Native American tribes whose incomes weigh heavily on energy exploration.

"Deb will have to deal with tribes who still need to be convinced that taking the billions of dollars from those companies for the rights to their land rights isn't worth it," said O.J. Semans, co-executive director of Four Directions, a legal advocacy group headquartered on South Dakota's Rosebud Indian Reservation.

Meanwhile, Haaland’s hearing will reveal whether she can garner the necessary support from Republicans, said Frank Maisano, a partner in Bracewell’s Policy Resolution Group, which represents energy sectors from oil and gas to renewables.

“She has to perform at her nomination hearing. She can’t dodge all questions,” he said.

About a dozen House Republicans have already voiced their opposition to Haaland and have asked Biden to recall her nomination. Their January 26 letter says Haaland, a vice-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, is a “direct threat to working men and women and a rejection of responsible development of America’s natural resources.”

Sometime next month, Haaland, perhaps dressed again in the Native American finery of her Laguna Pueblo, will sit before her Congressional peers and make her case for a Cabinet position.

Not far from where she'll be questioned sit statues and paintings of the people — overwhelming male and white.

Months ago, just before the start of a hearing of the National Parks, Forests and Public Lands subcommittee, U.S. Rep. Steven Horsford, a Democrat from Nevada and first vice-chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, was talking with Haaland, who chairs the panel, about the portraits of the past chairman that lined the walls.

Horsford remembered Haaland pointing out the frontiersmen and other white men being honored in the room.

“That’s one of the things that sticks with me about my interactions with her,” he said, noting the importance of challenging symbols when they offend others.

“She brings a perspective that is very unique and that only she can,” said Horsford. “I’m excited about the fact that she will now be over the very agency that can make those kinds of advances. It’s not on her to do it alone, but she will be able to lead it.”

Elizabeth Day, community engagement project manager at the Native American Community Development Institute in Minneapolis, said Haaland’s reputation across Indian country is “one of great respect,” even more so “now that she’s going into the heart of the beast.”

Day said Native activists across the nation will be energized like never before if Haaland becomes the next Interior secretary.

“I always repeat this, we need more than a seat at the table, we need to create the menu,” she said. “This could be it. Deb can be the cook in the kitchen.”

Grijalva backs Haaland for Interior Secretary

Rebecca Beitsch | *The Hill*

Published November 16, 2020

House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raúl Grijalva (D-Ariz.) is backing fellow committee member Rep. Deb Haaland (D-N.M.) as the Biden campaign considers nominating her to be the next secretary of the Interior.

Grijalva, who had been recommended for the top Interior position by the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, shared a letter with members Monday saying he is no longer interested in the role, preferring to continue his work through his chairmanship.

Instead, he urged committee members to put their weight behind Haaland, who would make history as the first-ever Native American Interior secretary.

“It is well past time that an Indigenous person brings history full circle at the Department of Interior. As her colleague on the Natural Resources Committee, I have seen first-hand the passion and dedication she puts into these issues at the forefront of the Interior Department from tackling the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women to crafting thoughtful solutions to combating the climate crisis using America’s public lands,” Grijalva wrote in the letter obtained by *The Hill*.

“It should go without saying, Rep. Haaland is absolutely qualified to do the job,” he added.

For Haaland, the backing of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus could be significant, particularly as the Democratic Party looks for ways to address faltering support from key demographics, including Latinos.

It could also help Haaland compete against outgoing Sen. Tom Udall (D-N.M.) who is also being considered for the job.

Udall, whose father held the role during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, has worked on Interior issues for much of his time in the Senate and may face an easier confirmation path with support from colleagues.

His office recently released a document detailing his conservation work during his time in office. One of his bills, which would conserve 30 percent of U.S. lands and waters by 2030, has been incorporated into President-elect Joe Biden’s climate plan.