

SPECIAL EDITION RACE IN AMERICA

2022



USA
TODAY

**JUSTICE
CHAMPION**
Attorney Ben Crump
fights for civil rights

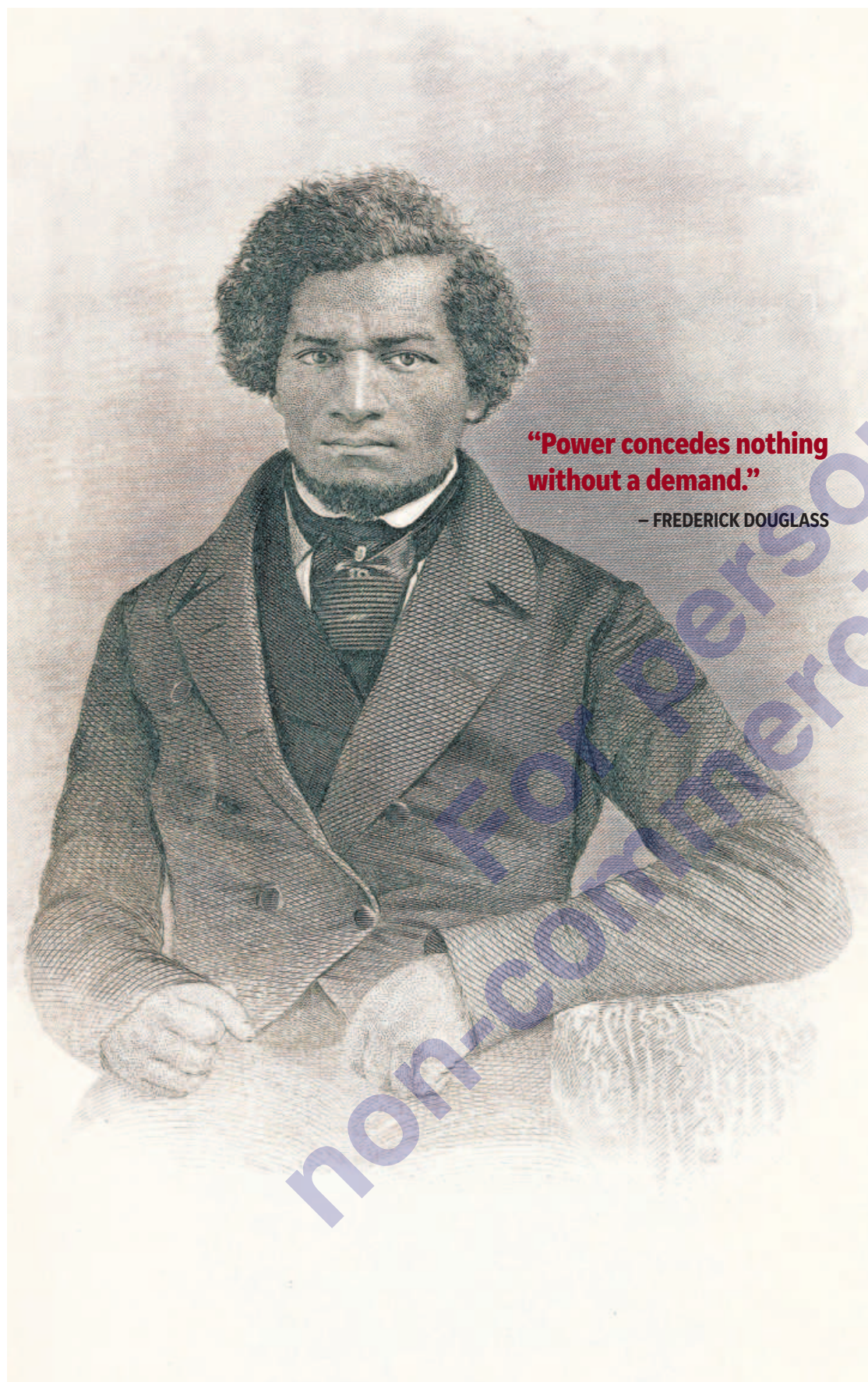
**WORKPLACE
DIVERSITY**
Benefits are widespread
when inclusion is a top priority

**CORPORATE
AMERICA**
Efforts to improve
inequities continue

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LETTER FROM THE GUEST EDITOR



“Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

— FREDERICK DOUGLASS

AS THE GREAT AMERICAN

statesman Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

Douglass was Black and formerly enslaved. But anyone fighting for justice can relate to his words, whether the goal is women’s rights, voting rights or human rights. Though marginalized since this country’s founding, racial and ethnic minorities continue to fight and make demands for justice, diversity and equity.

George Floyd’s murder essentially sparked a reckoning, a moment when centuries-old mistreatment of minorities broke through and pricked the national psyche, such as Reconstruction and the civil rights movement. Those eras began with great promise, but they stalled and America regressed to its mean.

The demand remains and the fight continues. This issue of *Race in America* examines some initiatives that followed Floyd’s death as a number of companies and industries promised change.

Before a killer’s knee and a global pandemic formed a flashpoint in the struggle, attorney Ben Crump was on the case. He’s tried to turn tragedies into hope since representing Trayvon Martin’s family more than 10 years ago. Check out the feature on Crump and an accompanying article on one of his collaborators, fellow attorney Jeff Storms.

Nearly every source within this magazine agrees that progress is evident in some areas, but we have a long way to go.

Native American leaders are pleased with actions from President Joe Biden thus far; one activist says the administration’s approach to tribal nations may be the best ever.

In another story, you’ll hear from educators who fear the lack of Asian American history taught in public high schools might exacerbate anti-Asian violence. You can also read stories with diverse angles on

fashion, travel, banking and video games.

Some folks say any mention or acknowledgment of race is divisive. They pretend that the color line is nonexistent, that racial minorities in America have the same obstacles and opportunities as white Americans. But history tells the truth, which our country faced when the Confederate states surrendered and when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act — events roughly 100 years apart.

Here we are in 2022. We’re still waiting for power to concede, to deliver justice, diversity and equity. The need is as great as it’s ever been. So is the demand.

An award-winning columnist who has worked at newspapers in Washington, D.C., and Florida, Deron Snyder spent 13 years with USA TODAY after graduating from Howard University. He currently writes for TheGrio.com, among other news organizations.



Deron Snyder

Deron Snyder,
Guest Editor

NEW ERA OF ENGAGEMENT

Biden seeks better accord between tribal nations and federal government

By Deron Snyder

NEAR THE PEAK OF the COVID-19 pandemic, around the time President Joe Biden took office, Native Americans were contracting the coronavirus at 3.5 times the rate of white Americans. In some states, Indigenous people were dying at a rate five times their population share. The public health crisis merely exacerbated longstanding inequities in Indian Country.

Battling the virus was among several issues that Biden outlined in his *Plan for Tribal Nations*, rolled out during the 2020 presidential campaign. The ultimate outcome resulted in a plan that expands economic opportunity and community development in Native communities, strengthens the nation-to-nation relationship and addresses health disparities and the overall safety of Native communities, from the people to the land and natural and cultural resources.

The Indian Health Service of the De-



CHIP SOMODEVILLA/GETTY IMAGES

President Joe Biden and Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland celebrate the announcement of three proclamations restoring protections for Utah's Bears Ears, Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments, and Northeast Canyons and Seamounts Marine national monuments off New England's coast in October 2021.

partment of Health and Human Services collaborated with tribal health programs and organizations to administer more than 2.2 million vaccinations in Native communities. Roughly \$44 million has been invested to help tribes recover from the pandemic and increase equity.

"The effort related to Native communities has been really good," says Nick Tilsen, president and CEO of NDN Collective, an advocacy group. "Organizers mobilized throughout the Indigenous world because our population was at high risk and because of the societal struggles we have, so our vaccination rates became really high. The federal government responded really well. Quite frankly, that's something we're not used to seeing."

Jourdan Bennett-Begaye, editor of *Indian Country Today*, says the administration worked hand-in-hand with tribal nations, many of which were ahead of the curve in requiring face masks, enforcing social distancing in areas where close interaction can't be avoided. "One report found that 75



JEMEL COUNTESS/GETTY IMAGES FOR NATIVE ORGANIZERS ALLIANCE

This Red Road totem pole, carved by members of the Lummi Nation from a 400-year-old cedar tree, arrived in Washington, D.C., from Washington state. It was designed to draw attention to threats facing Indigenous communities and sacred sites such as Utah's Bears Ears National Monument, parts of which President Joe Biden expanded last year.

percent of Indigenous people wanted to get vaccinated to protect their communities," Bennett-Begaye says. "For a while, tribal nations were leading the country's vaccination rates, higher than any other ethnic group."

When Biden signed the America Rescue Plan, he authorized more than \$32 billion to tribal communities and

Indigenous people, the nation's single-largest federal investment in Native communities. The resources were vital in helping tribal governments rebuild and recover from the pandemic's economic devastation.

"The recovery act opened the door for substantial investments to come into Indigenous communities," Tilsen says.

"That commitment can really translate into long-term community development and resiliency strategies for those communities. It's definitely a step in the right direction."

Additional steps were necessary and outlined in the plan, but public health

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SARAH SILBIGER/GETTY IMAGES

Secretary Haaland, center, the first Native American to serve as a Cabinet secretary, wore a long rainbow ribbon skirt during her swearing-in ceremony March 18, 2021, in Washington, D.C. The traditional garment was designed specifically for Haaland.



CAROLYN KASTER/POOL/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, right, praised the virtual summit hosted by President Biden that included more than 570 tribal leaders in November 2021. Nez said he was glad the Navajo Nation had a seat at the table.

came first. “At least in the beginning, assisting tribes in dealing with the pandemic had to be the top priority,” says Tim Coulter, executive director of the Indian Law Resource Center. “The tribes were overwhelmed and having a really tough time with COVID. That began to dwindle in summer 2021.”

REPRESENTATION MATTERS

Managing the pandemic was the top priority. But Biden saw diversity as another pressing matter and addressed it quickly, as well. He picked Deb Haaland as secretary of the Department of the Interior, making her the first Native American to lead a Cabinet agency. Several other Indigenous people have filled important roles for the first time — such as Charles Sams III, director of the National Park Service — but Haaland represents the biggest move, symbolically.

“That was the most important thing that stood out right away to tribal leaders and organizations around the country,” Coulter says. “She’s a woman who’s thoroughly Indian, very experienced in Indian affairs and government work. She’s not somebody who just happens to be Indian by genetics and is in fact wrapped up in other interests. She’s secretary of the interior, not just head of Indian Affairs.”

Bennett-Begaye has noticed a change at some federal agencies. “I’m starting to see more Native people,” she says. “Not only in traditional roles at the Bureau of Indian Affairs or Bureau of Indian Education, but also in nontraditional roles like the Department of Agriculture or Commerce or Treasury.”

As the highest-ranking Native American official in the federal government, Haaland leads a department that has had a fraught history with Indigenous

people. The Interior Department is not only responsible for the well-being of America’s 1.9 million Native people, it also manages about 500 million acres of public land. And there are significant implications on energy and climate issues that the department is charged with addressing that pose challenges to human health and quality of life.

“This has been a big first year in the Biden-Harris administration — for Indian Country in particular,” Haaland told reporters on a conference call last March. “There are some incredible moments that will be part of our collective memory for generations to come.”

COMING TOGETHER

In addition to ensuring that Indigenous people are represented, Biden sought to make sure they’re heard. He brought

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leaders from more than 570 tribes together for the White House Tribal Nations Summit last November to coincide with National Native American Heritage Month. It was the first summit since 2016 and the first hosted at the White House; past conferences took place at the Interior Department.

More than a dozen new initiatives were announced, including unprecedented collaborations between tribal leaders and the departments of Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs. The administration also committed to a tribal treaty rights memorandum of understanding involving multiple federal agencies, plus the establishment of a treaty rights database to support the agreement.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez was among several leaders who praised the summit and what it signified about the Biden administration's approach to Native Americans. "This is the first time in my lifetime that I see the Navajo Nation having a seat at the table at the

White House, with Cabinet members and the administration," Nez told *Indian Country Today*. "And they are listening, and the commitment is there in support of the Navajo people, and we appreciate that from this administration."

In June, Haaland announced members of the first Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee, intent on giving tribal leaders direct and consistent communication with Interior Department leadership. "Tribes deserve a seat at the decision-making table before policies are made that impact their communities," Haaland said at the National Congress of American Indians 2022 Mid-Year Conference. She said the committee "will be integral to ensuring tribal leaders can engage at the highest levels of the department on the issues that matter most to their people."

Coulter says Biden's policy mandating that agencies consult with tribes is a net positive, though it can strain underfunded tribes. "They almost need a separate office or agency just to do the

consulting," he says. "They're keeping up, but it can be difficult. Like you need a drink of water, but it's hard to drink from a fire hydrant."

Unless results change, increasing or decreasing the flow doesn't matter to Tilsen.

"There's been a long history of the federal government doing consultations and then doing whatever it wants anyway," he says. "I think the general desire is Indigenous people want to move away from the policy of consultation into a policy of free and prior informed consent where Indians actually have the power in exercising their sovereignty."

MAKING MOVES

Biden displayed a Native-centric focus in October when he issued the first presidential proclamation of Indigenous Peoples Day. The decree highlighted grassroots efforts to appreciate Native Americans, not Christopher Columbus, on the federal holiday.

"For generations, federal policies systematically sought to assimilate and displace Native people and eradicate Native cultures," Biden wrote in the proclamation. "Today, we recognize Indigenous peoples' resilience and strength as well as the immeasurable positive impact that they have made on every aspect of American society."

A month later, Biden signed an executive order to improve safety and justice for Indigenous people. According to the Association on American Indian Affairs, American Indians and Alaska Natives are more than twice as likely to be victims of a violent crime and Native American women are at least two times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted when compared with other races.

The executive order also addressed the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. A special unit was formed within the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide leadership and direction between federal agencies, including the departments of Interior and Justice.

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MANDEL NGAN/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

President Biden told leaders at the tribal summit that the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act would provide more than \$13 billion in direct funds to Indian Country to help support clean drinking water, high-speed internet and more.



MARK RALSTON/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES (2); KAREN DUCEY/GETTY IMAGES

Navajo Indians line up in their vehicles to collect water and supplies from a distribution site as the COVID-19 virus spread through the communities at the Utah and Arizona border in May 2020. A tribal member's tattoo and post-vaccination bandage show support for Navajo communities, which were reported to have one of the highest per-capita rates of COVID-19 infections in the U.S. A nurse checks vitals at a COVID-19 testing site in Arizona.

Additionally, the Violence Against Women Act was reauthorized, with new resources and authority for Native governments. Tribes historically lack authority over non-Natives on reservations, even when non-Natives commit crimes.

"That's a terrible thing," Coulter says. "Some improvements have been made in that area, some small, incremental steps."

In May, the Interior Department released an unprecedented report on 408 federally supported boarding schools that systematically stripped Native Americans of their cultures and identities between 1818 and 1969. The number of children confirmed to have died at such schools — at least 500 reported so far — is expected to rise as research continues. Congress has approved \$7 million for the next phase, a focus on burial sites and identifying the children.

Bennett-Begaye says Haaland played a critical role for the study to happen. "She understood the history and impact on Indigenous communities, and the impact on current generations. This will help communities heal and hopefully educate mainstream America on Indigenous people. It will also help the education system and public policy."

Tilsen notes that the majority of states do not teach Native American history, making such reports important because "They hold a mirror up to American society to remind them there was an American holocaust," he says. "There wasn't just one original sin. There were several."

MOTHER EARTH

During her Senate confirmation hearing, Haaland said she believes every Indigenous person understands the stakes of environmental protection and climate change. "It's difficult to not feel obligated to protect this land," she said.

Pipelines represent a core test of the administration's commitment, and Biden sided with Native Americans and environmentalists on his first day in office. Reversing a decision by the Trump

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administration, he revoked the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline, which could have adversely affected land belonging to tribes in South Dakota and Montana. Biden also restored protections for Utah's Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase Escalante, hundreds of thousands of acres that are sacred to Indigenous people and were eyed for mining and other development. He also moved to ban federal oil and gas leasing in a 10-mile zone around more sacred land, New Mexico's Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

Biden also became the first president to incorporate tribal ecological knowledge into the government's approach to climate change, and created two new climate positions in the White House. But he has not delivered on some of the broader green energy initiatives outlined in his Build Back Better plan.

"I give him a 'C' or incomplete on climate," journalist and activist Julian Brave NoiseCat told *Indian Country Today*. "He came out of the gate very strong on issues of climate change and the environment (but) ran into issues within his own party."

The Dakota Access Pipeline, which is already built and pumping oil less than a mile from the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, remains a sore spot. Attorneys for the federal government have refused to shut it down while an environmental review is conducted, even as activists argue that the pipeline is illegal because it doesn't have a valid operating permit.

Coulter acknowledges the challenges of energy policy, particularly mining, which can have severe negative effects for tribes. "Mining is really harmful in polluting and often results in loss of land," Coulter says. "On the other hand, nickel and cadmium are necessary for batteries. You have to thread the needle to find a way to get the natural resources that are really needed."

Since founding the Indian Law Resource Center in 1978, Coulter has watched eight U.S. presidents employ various approaches toward Indian Country. "This administration is by far

the most aggressively assertive (in terms of improving relationships with tribes," he says. "That's out of any administration I've seen the last 50 years. Maybe ever."

Tilsen wants to see more — particularly the legislative branch stepping up to address ongoing inequities.

"People talk about Native people being treated wrongly in history, but what about the statistics right now?" he asks. "New policy is needed to fully fund and adhere to the trust responsibilities this government made to the Indigenous people of this land."



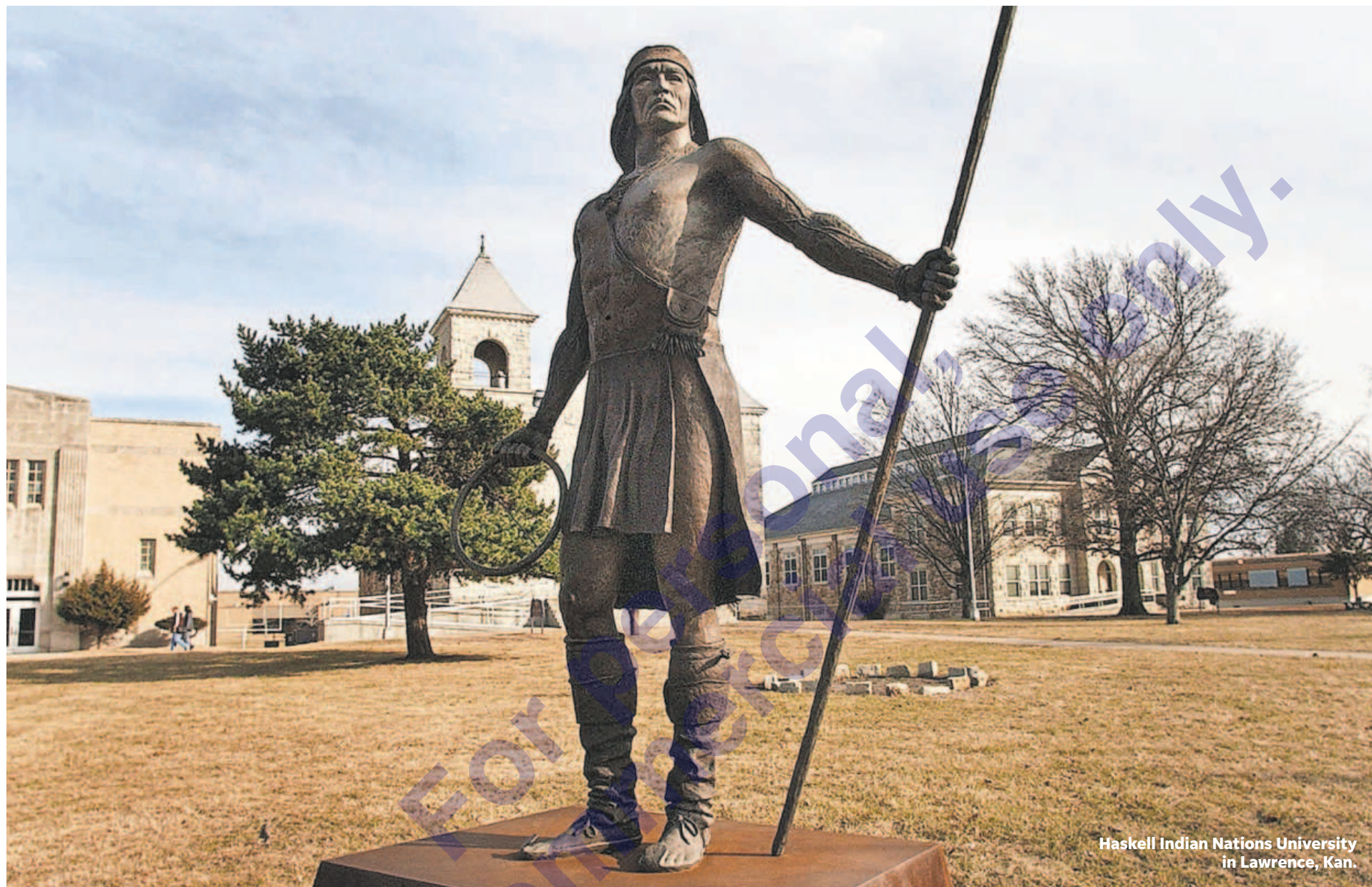
President Biden and Secretary Haaland have taken action to restore protections and boundaries for Utah's Bears Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase Escalante, hundreds of thousands of acres that are sacred to Native Americans.



GEORGE FREY/GETTY IMAGES; ANNA MONEYMAKER/GETTY IMAGES

Demonstrators dance as they march in honor of Indigenous Peoples Day at Freedom Plaza on Oct. 11, 2021, in Washington, D.C. The activists were demanding that Biden stop approving fossil fuel projects and declare a climate emergency ahead of the United Nations summit in November.

EDUCATION



Haskell Indian Nations University
in Lawrence, Kan.

ORLIN WAGNER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Enabling Education

New federal funding strengthens tribal colleges

By Deron Snyder

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN MADE history in October 2021 as the first president to commemorate Indigenous Peoples Day.

Another policy announcement that week received less attention, but it further demonstrated the administration's commitment to Indigenous people, particularly in education. Biden issued an executive order to advance education and economic opportunities for Native Americans, as well as committing to supporting tribal colleges and universities (TCU).

"That was a very positive thing," says Cheryl Crazy Bull, president and CEO of the American Indian College Fund. "It creates an environment where federal agencies have to report on

how they're supporting Indian education and tribal colleges and universities. I've sat in on sessions where federal agencies are consulting with TCUs on how they can participate in federal programs." The coordination increases the awareness of resources for students.

There are 32 fully accredited TCUs. Located primarily on tribal lands in the Midwest and Southwest, they're often the only postsecondary schools within some of the nation's poorest rural areas.

Prior to his executive order, Biden provided financial backing in the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan he signed in March 2021. The plan earmarked \$850 million for the Bureau of Indian Education and TCUs.

With the coronavirus wreaking havoc and

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EDUCATION

exacerbating pre-existing inequities, the funding was sorely needed.

“(COVID-19) highlighted tribal colleges’ lack of cyber infrastructure,” says Carrie Billy, president and CEO of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. “We knew going into the pandemic that tribal colleges have the lowest internet access, at the highest cost, using the oldest equipment of any group of institutions in this country.”

TCUs are primarily dependent on federal funding due to the unique relationship between tribes and the U.S. government. Unlike public colleges and universities located off reservations, TCUs are not able to benefit from a state tax base that provides regular funding for higher education. Crazy Bull says there’s a constant fight for equitable funding, including from the departments of Education, Agriculture and Commerce.

CRITICAL MISSION

As underscored in a recent federal report on Native American boarding schools, the U.S. government historically has used education to erase the identity and culture of Indigenous people.

The mainstream higher education system barely included Native Americans; Billy says some tribes never had a college graduate before TCUs were founded in the late 1960s. Tribal colleges are charged with preserving culture, language and land history, while equipping students with skills and abilities to help tribes manage their own resources, according to the Department of Education.

“Tribal colleges have both a restorative and regenerative mission,” Crazy Bull says. “Working in this profession for over 40 years, I’ve witnessed the transformative experience that students and others have, the way it changes the trajectory of individuals and entire families.”

The institutions vary greatly in size. Northwest Indian College has roughly

500 students, with a main campus on the Lummi Reservation near Bellingham, Wash., and extensions on several reservations. Diné College, located on the Navajo Nation reservation in Tsaile, Ariz., has expanded into urban communities in Arizona and New Mexico, serving nearly 1,400 students. Conversely, Saginaw Chippewa Tribal College in Mount Pleasant, Mich., has

about 100 students at its modest facilities on the reservation, where it began in 1998 with an office, two classrooms and a computer lab.

Increased funding is always welcome and desperately needed, but the Biden administration has shown support in other ways, too, Billy says.



“Working in this profession for over 40 years, I’ve witnessed the transformative experience that students and others have, the way it changes the trajectory of individuals and entire families.”

— CHERYL CRAZY BULL,
president and CEO, American
Indian College Fund

BASIC NEEDS

“They’ve been flexible in making sure tribal colleges can participate in existing federal programs like competitive grants,” Billy says. “TCUs have always been at a disadvantage because of their small size and lack of grant writers. The government is being flexible in how (they) look at apprenticeships in rural areas. They’re trying to break down those barriers.”

Many students still struggle to meet basic

needs, which requires low-income resources like federal assistance with food and energy bills. About half of the enrollees are first-generation students, with many who would benefit from extra academic support. Others transfer from mainstream institutions where they perhaps didn’t do well. Recent expenditures, partially due to the pandemic, have increased the schools’ online education offerings and ability to reach students in urban areas.

“Our distinction isn’t race-based,” Billy says. “It’s political, based on treaty obligations, trust responsibilities and the exchange of over 1 billion acres of land. But the equity focus of this administration has helped elevate the importance of tribal colleges and the inequity that has existed for decades.”



Northwest Indian College, Lummi Campus, Bellingham, Wash.



2021 graduation at Diné College, Tsaile, Ariz.

AMERICAN INDIAN COLLEGE FUND; NORTHWEST INDIAN COLLEGE; DINÉ COLLEGE