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Native Americans Anticipate Educational Impact with Haaland at Helm



In 2017, only 21% of Native American children younger than 18 lived in a household with a parent who completed a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 52% of white households. (stgo.org)



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SANTA FE, N.M. – Native American educators say tribal representation at the highest levels of government will likely encourage more civic engagement and trust in the government.

If Rep. Deb Haaland, D-N.M., is approved for the position of Interior Secretary, she would become the nation's first Native American Cabinet secretary and oversee the Bureau of Indian Education.

Cheryl Crazy Bull, president of the Denver-based American Indian College Fund, said only about 20% of 18- to 24-year-old [Native American students](#) are enrolled in college compared with 41% of the overall U.S. population.

She argued it's time they see themselves more broadly represented.

"So I view having a Native person in that Secretary of Interior role as just vital to being able to develop better education," Crazy Bull contended.

On Tuesday, Sen. Steve Daines, R-Mont., and Sen. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., put holds on Haaland's nomination for the job, saying they want more debate on her positions on oil and gas development.

Despite the holds, Haaland is expected to be confirmed.

The latest data show only 16% of Native Americans attain a [bachelor's degree](#) or higher and only 9% attain associate degrees.

Crazy Bull pointed out the case can be made for a system that is more responsive to the specific needs of Native students.

"Education in tribal communities is really about upholding identity," Crazy Bull explained. "So, her policies and practices around land and resource use, sacred sites; all those things will impact the education environment for our communities."

In addition to the Bureau of Indian Education, Indian Affairs and the Trust Funds Administration, the Department of Interior under Haaland would oversee about 500 million acres of public land and federal policies affecting the 574 federally recognized tribal governments.

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