



Kianna Pete

WLN Indian Country Fellow



CAN YOU TELL US A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS WORK IN INDIAN COUNTRY AND ON THE NAVAJO NATION?

My name is Kianna, and I'm Diné (Navajo), originally from Newcomb, New Mexico on the Navajo Nation, but was raised in Farmington, NM with my four siblings and two brothers. I'm also a student at Columbia University, obtaining a B.A. in Political Science and Ethnicity and Race Studies. My interest in politics is inspired by the matriarchal leadership and storytelling within my family. In particular, my grandmother would tell me stories about her life, which introduced me to the discrimination and political neglect experienced by Native Americans. Motivated by these stories, I wanted to help my Indigenous community in any way possible. In high school, I started working in Indian Country as a summer intern for the Newcomb Chapter House. The following year, I interned for the Congressional Office of Senator Ben Ray Luján in Santa Fe, NM to manage constituent concerns and gather COVID policy updates. I then worked at the Association on American Affairs, where I tracked legislation and data to develop an index of Native American sacred sites. Most recently, I conducted research at the University of Michigan to examine the impact of Native identity on U.S. political engagement. My findings summarized my experience working in politics, and that is the disconnect between tribal communities and policy decision-making.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO APPLY FOR WESTERN LEADERS NETWORK'S NEW INDIAN COUNTRY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM, AND WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE FELLOWSHIP?

My inspiration to apply for the Western Leaders Network's Indian Country Fellowship program stems from my desire to protect tribal sovereignty. Growing up in northwestern New Mexico, I have been exposed to the circumstances that face the Navajo Nation as well as those faced by the broader Native community. To this day, I see families on the reservation traveling distances to obtain clean water, while my home is a hub for oil

and coal mine industries. Witnessing both of these events, I learned that climate change is a universal issue that affects everyone. Yet for Native communities, this issue is piled on top of a history that has ignored the sovereign rights of tribal nations. My biggest goal for this fellowship is to thoughtfully facilitate environmental policy solutions in consultation with tribal leaders. Indigenous peoples make up less than 5% of the world population but protect over 80% of the Earth's biodiversity. As such, Indigenous representation in policy is necessary in order to develop sustainable environments. Indian Country spans multiple states of the Interior west, so their input is crucial to WLN's work.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ISSUES YOU PLAN TO BE WORKING ON OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS AS OUR INDIAN COUNTRY FELLOW?

One pressing issue I will be working on is reducing methane emissions in Indian Country. Methane emissions are a major contributor to global warming. It is a greenhouse gas with more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide over the first 20 years after it reaches the atmosphere. The Bureau of Land Management's proposed draft rule to reduce methane emissions is a step in the right direction, but can be strengthened by also phasing out routine flaring. Indian Country is directly affected by these gases, so reducing methane emissions would prevent the needless waste of public and tribal resources, protect our communities and constituents from pollution, and build a more resilient climate future.

CAN YOU TALK A BIT SPECIFICALLY ABOUT THE WORK YOU'LL BE DOING AROUND REDUCING METHANE EMISSIONS FEDERALLY AND ON THE NAVAJO NATION AND HOW YOU'LL BE ENGAGING INDIGENOUS OFFICIALS IN THIS WORK?

My primary role is to bridge the environmental goals of tribal communities with Western Leaders Network. I hope to expand WLN's network of tribal leaders and bring awareness to the mining, oil, and gas pollution that affects Indian Country. As the first Indian Country Fellow, I am part of the foundation that will hopefully grow into a board of Indigenous leaders at WLN. I will help facilitate tribal leader participation in policy discussions and issue campaigns to protect sacred sites and tribal lands from mining and oil and gas pollution. This also includes engaging Indigenous elected officials over the next several months in the development of methane safeguards at the federal level and on the Navajo Nation to protect tribal communities and our climate from methane emissions.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH TRIBAL LEADERS AND OUR NETWORK?

Family and community-building are things I prioritize outside work. Growing up in a large family, being an older sibling continues to be part of my identity. I cherish my parents and siblings, who have always been supportive of my academic and professional goals. They are the biggest influences within my life and a big reason why I do the work I do.

Fostering Indigenous community in educational spaces is something that is important to me. At university, I am the president of the Native American Council, co-chair of the Indigenous Mentorship Program, and Indigenous Student Housing. I also have worked in undergraduate admissions for the past two years to help improve college access for Indigenous and tribal communities.

