



# INDIAN»COUNTRY»TODAY

Digital. Indigenous. News.

## E-Weekly Newsletter - August 13, 2020



# Indian Country's COVID-19 syllabus

**Data, story summaries, lists of closures, resources  
(As of August 12, 2020)**

### **COVID-19 Tracker in the United States**

**Total cases:** 5,119,711

**Total deaths:** 163,651

**Jurisdictions reporting cases:** 54

(50 states, District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, Guam, and US Virgin Islands)

**Cases confirmed in the Indian health system:** 18,339

**Total deaths in the Indian health system:** 674

(Confirmed by tribes, the Indian Health Service, state public health agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

\*\*\* Report COVID-19 cases in your tribe on this [Google Form](#) \*\*\*

[Click here for stories that have been posted by Indian Country Today.](#)

Inside this week's  
issue of  
Indian Country Today

#Coronavirus  
Check out Indian  
Country Today's  
coverage of COVID-19

#LetterFromTheEditor  
Indian Country Today  
editor Mark Trahan  
looks to the future

#NativeVote20  
More primaries across  
the United States means  
more Native candidates  
running for office

# More than a million thanks

By Mark Trahant

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

A couple of years ago we relaunched Indian Country Today.

We were ambitious. We wanted to create a digital “newspaper” that would open up a “spacious channel” (a term used by the first editor of The Cherokee Phoenix, Elias Boudinot, in 1826). We figured we’d operate a small newsroom, perhaps six or seven reporters and editors, based in Washington, D.C., writing about issues across Turtle Island.

Looking back: We had no idea. That spacious channel opened up in ways that we never could have imagined. Our writers are now in Washington, Phoenix, Anchorage, Cincinnati and Albuquerque, New Mexico, and we have conversations just about

every day where an editor says, “We need another reporter.”

The biggest surprise (well, maybe the second biggest surprise) was broadcasting. We really expected to be a digital newspaper. That was the story. Then out of the blue we decided to do an election night broadcast in 2018. It was a huge success; the first time that an election team reported about what was happening with all of the Native candidates on a broadcast in real time. Of course it was a record year with the election of national politicians, Deb Haaland, Sharice Davids and Peggy Flanagan, plus the reelection of Tom Cole and Markwayne Mullin. (And the many candidates for offices ranging from state legislatures to county commissions.)

That was a turning point. We knew broadcast had to be part of the future. (The future that we were creating.) We looked for partners to make that happen, and Arizona State University was a quick yes — and a year ago we moved our main newsroom to the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication and Arizona PBS. We planned, and practiced, and worked to produce a weekly news program that we hoped PBS stations would be keen on airing. We received significant funding from [Vision Maker Media](#) and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

[Read more here](#)



Indian Country Today's daily newscast will come from the historic Phoenix Indian School Visitors Center at Steele Park in Phoenix. (Indian Country Today photo)

# 6 Native legislative candidates advance in Minnesota

By Dalton Walker

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*Updated: Heather Keeler, Yankton Sioux, won her primary Tuesday, joining two other Natives who will appear on the general election ballot in the state House and three in the Senate.*

*#NativeVote20*

Minnesota will have six Native American candidates in state legislative races come November.

Democratic candidate Heather Keeler, Yankton Sioux, captured the Minnesota House, District 4A primary on Tuesday with 66 percent of the vote.

Keeler received 1,877 votes, according to the **Minnesota Secretary of State Office**. She moves on to face Republican Edwin Hahn in November's general election. Hahn received 844 votes Tuesday in an uncontested party race.

Keeler praised her supporters who voted in a COVID-19 pandemic.

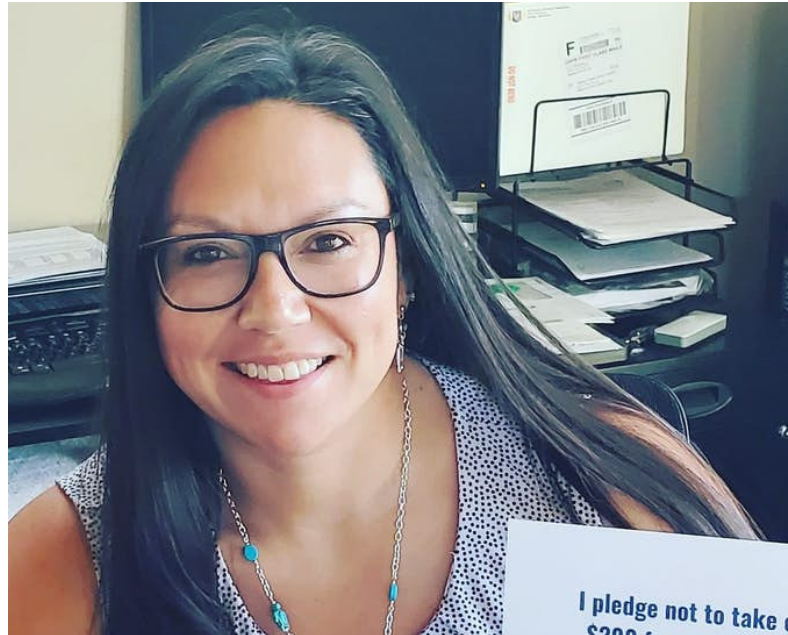
"It tells me that my community is invested in being a voice for change," Keeler said. "We had a huge turnout for just the primary, and so that leads me to believe that we'll have a really good turnout in November."

Keeler said she's been connecting with community members through phone and other nonphysical efforts.

"We still have no significant plan to knock on doors because the health of my community is a priority, and so we are still going to be making a virtual world as personalized as possible," she added.

Absentee ballots in Minnesota postmarked by Aug. 11 and received by Aug. 13 will be counted, meaning Tuesday's results could increase. However, Keeler appears to be in good shape moving to November and said her primary opponent called her to concede.

Keeler joins Democrats Jamie Becker-Finn, Leech lake Band of Ojibwe descent, and Gaylene Spolarich, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, in November races for House seats. Becker-Finn, an incumbent, and Spolarich were uncontested and didn't have a primary. ([Read more here](#))



Heather Keeler, Yankton Sioux, Minnesota House District 4A candidate. (Photo courtesy of Keeler's campaign website.)





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<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/cloth-face-cover-guidance.html>

Contact your local Indian health care provider for more information, visit **Healthcare.gov**, or call 1-800-318-2596.



**HealthCare.gov**

## Native Hawaiian candidates cruise to November

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Kaiali'i "Kai" Kahele, a Democrat and Hawaii state senator, is a candidate for Hawaii's 2nd Congressional District. (Photo courtesy of Kai Kahele campaign website)

By Dalton Walker

*Kaiali'i "Kai" Kahele captured 66 percent of the vote in his Democratic primary Saturday and is expected to win in the general. #NativeVote20*

An open U.S. House seat will have three Native Hawaiian candidates on the general election ballot, with one being a Democratic front-runner in heavily blue Hawaii.

Kaiali'i "Kai" Kahele captured 66 percent of the vote Saturday in a Democratic primary for the 2nd Congressional District, which covers suburban Honolulu and the state's more rural islands.

Republican candidate Joe Akana beat out eight other GOP challengers with nearly 39 percent of the vote. The third Native Hawaiian candidate, Jonathan Hoomanawanui, is a member of the newly formed Aloha 'Aina Party and ran unopposed Saturday.

[Read more here](#)

# Kamala Harris' record in Indian Country dates 10 years

By Aliyah Chavez

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*Joe Biden's VP pick gained experience with tribes as California's attorney general, as a U.S. senator and as a presidential candidate*

News broke Tuesday announcing Kamala Harris as the vice-presidential running mate to Joe Biden.

So what is Harris' experience working with Indian Country?

Much of it stems from her time serving as California's attorney general, her time as a U.S. senator and from her 10-month presidential run.



Kamala Harris (Photo courtesy of Kamala Harris 2020 presidential campaign)

Harris began serving as attorney general in 2011, where she gained both support and criticism from California tribes on a number of issues. The state is home to 109 federally recognized tribes.

In her bids for election as attorney general in 2010 and 2014, Harris received support from 11 California tribes, resulting in donations of upwards of \$100,000, the [Los Angeles Times reported](#).

She garnered criticism from California tribes following her decision to deny fee-to-trust applications, which asked for tribal lands to be put into trust.

Native leaders asked her opinion about this contentious issue at the Frank LaMere Native American Presidential Forum one year ago. She gave remarks at the event virtually.

Harris said her job as attorney general included being the lawyer for the governor of California. She said the governor made decisions about the fee-to-trust application.

It resulted in her having to file the letters as the law officer of the governor.

"But that was never a reflection and has never been a reflection of my personal perspective," Harris said at [the event held in Sioux City, Iowa](#).

[Read more on Harris here](#)

# Navajo president asks Donald Trump to block tribal citizen's execution

By Aliyah Chavez

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*Lezmond Mitchell is set to be put to death Aug. 26 for killing an elderly woman and her granddaughter*

The Navajo Nation is asking President Donald Trump to reduce the sentence of a Navajo citizen set to be executed by lethal injection later this month.

Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez appeared virtually before the U.S. pardon attorney in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday to advocate for clemency for Lezmond Mitchell. Also in attendance at the hour-and-a-half meeting were two lawyers representing Mitchell.

"We are grateful for the opportunity to discuss Lezmond Mitchell's case with the Office of the Pardon Attorney," the attorneys said in a statement.

"We appreciated their thoughtful questions about the tribal sovereignty issues that lie at the heart of this case. President Nez gave a powerful statement about how this case could set an unfortunate precedent for tribes across the United States, and how Lezmond's death sentence violates the Navajo Nation's sovereignty, culture and traditional values."

The meeting came 11 days after the Nez administration penned a letter to Trump requesting executive clemency.

Mitchell was convicted of the 2001 murder of a 63-year-old Navajo woman and her 9-year-old granddaughter on the Navajo Nation.

Mitchell, 38, is the only Native person on federal death row, following the Trump administration's decision to restore federal executions after 17 years.

Despite the grisly nature of the killings, the Navajo Nation has publicly opposed Mitchell's execution, citing religious and traditional beliefs. The family of the victims has also publicly opposed Mitchell's execution.



An execution date for Navajo citizen Lezmond Mitchell is scheduled for Aug. 26 at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terra Haute, Indiana. (Photo by the Federal Bureau of Prisons)

[Read more here](#)



# Black, Choctaw judge: Being harassed was 'one of the best learning experiences'

By Kalle Benallie

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*Ada Brown is one of only two Native women serving on the federal bench*

U.S. District Court Judge Ada Brown says one of her best learning experiences as a young assistant district attorney was a racist encounter at a Dallas bookstore.

Brown, who is Black and Choctaw, was reading at the store when a manager yelled "I'm sick of you people!" The woman told Brown to leave, threatened to have her charged with criminal trespass and called the police.



U.S. District Court Judge Ada Brown (Photo: U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas website)

"I realized that even today, sometimes brown people really are harassed for no good reason," Brown wrote in a [Dallas Morning News op-ed](#) published in 2011. "We really can be arrested for merely being at the wrong place at the wrong time."

Brown was confirmed to her current post last fall, becoming the first Black or Native woman to serve as a judge in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Texas.

She was President Donald Trump's first Black female judicial appointee, according to [Bloomberg Law](#). Brown, a citizen of the [Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma](#), was also his first Native pick.

She joins 46 Black women on the federal bench, according to the [Center for American Progress](#), and only one other Native woman, U.S. District Court Judge Diane Humetewa, Hopi, in Arizona. Brown is identified as Black in a list of federal judges compiled by the Federal Judicial Center.

Democrat Joe Biden has suggested that if he's elected president, he will [nominate a Black woman](#) to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Of the 870 federal judges in the U.S., only one other is Native; however, Frank H. Seay, Cherokee, took senior status in the Eastern District Court of Oklahoma in 2003 and has been inactive for many years.

[Read more here](#)

# ‘Mothers are medicine’

By Mary Annette Pember

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*Indigenous women celebrate being strong, resilient and latched after mainstream breastfeeding groups didn't meet their unique needs*

Indigenous “lactivists” have declared this week as Native Breastfeeding Week. This is the second year a self-described grassroots group has organized the event. Due to COVID-19 this year, all events are virtual and offered on the [Native Breastfeeding Week Facebook page](#).

The benefits of breastfeeding are legendary. Breastfed children have lower rates of diabetes,

allergies, infections, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, neurodevelopmental outcomes and other health problems. For mothers, breastfeeding helps reduce obesity, decreases rates of breast and ovarian cancer, and creates a strong bond between mother and baby. Studies show that breastfeeding releases oxytocin which reduces the symptoms of postpartum depression. Oxytocin, often called the love hormone, is secreted by the pituitary gland when breastfeeding.

Indigenous doula Shashana Nenookaasikwe Craft says breastmilk can help babies recover from an illness. Craft cites studies showing that saliva from a sick baby sends messages to the mother's body while nursing to produce antibodies to help the baby fight disease.

As a baby suckles at its mother's breast, a vacuum is created, according to lactation researcher Katie Hinde of Arizona State University in the [Washington Post](#). Within that vacuum, the baby's saliva is sucked back into the mother's nipple where receptors in the mammary gland read its signals, alerting the mother's body to create and adjust pathogens in the breast milk.

“Mothers are medicine,” Craft says.

Craft of the White Earth Nation, is part of an extensive, informal network of grassroots lactivists, birth workers, mothers and supporters who are taking part in Native Breastfeeding Week. Craft also helped organize an Indigenous breastfeeding and perinatal support circle that has monthly virtual meetings.



Shashana Nenookaasikwe Craft is an Indigenous doula. (Photo courtesy Green Photography)

[Read more here](#)



# Watch the Indian Country Today newscast!

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**Dean Seneca:**  
**'Optimistic' tribes are stepping up to the plate during pandemic**

Indian Country Today Newscast on Wednesday, August 12 with guests Dean Seneca, chief executive officer of Seneca Scientific Solutions Plus; plus Indian Country Today's Dalton Walker



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# Pop culture artists team with educators for Native lessons

By Sandra Hale Schulman

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*New series features six contemporary Native changemakers and details on their contributions to the U.S.*

With classroom education in disarray due to pandemic shutdowns, IllumiNative, a nonprofit founded by Crystal Echo Hawk, of Echo Hawk Consulting, and a group of respected Native artists including Bunky Echo-Hawk, Gregg Deal and Jared Yazzie have teamed up to provide art lesson plans for schools featuring influential Native personalities.

The plans create opportunities to showcase accurate and positive representations of Native peoples by illuminating contemporary Native art, voices, stories, issues and ideas in popular culture.

The initiative finds them partnering with the [National Indian Education Association](#) and [Amplifier](#), a group that draws from an impressive pool of artists to create digital education tools, lesson plans and resources about Native contemporary life.

The plans will reach more than 1 million students and families learning at home. Resources are available for free and are downloadable from their website.

The new lesson plan and artwork series for educators features six contemporary Native changemakers and their political, artistic, literary and athletic contributions to this country.

U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland, as drawn by Bunky Echo-Hawk, Pawnee, is proud and strong in her silver Navajo pearls, rays of pink and blue light shooting out around her.

Suzan Shown Harjo, also by Bunky Echo-Hawk, has the House of Congress behind her, as she is the 2014 recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama, who acknowledged Shown Harjo's work, saying: "She's taught all of us that Native values make Americans stronger."

[Click here to see other illustrations and continue reading the story.](#)



U.S. Rep. Deb Haaland (Bunky Echo-Hawk)

# Native kid singers open call for a new animated series

By Vincent Schilling

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*Rene Haynes Casting looking for Indigenous actors who can sing for lead roles in an upcoming 'untitled Thunder Mountain project'*

The agency responsible for casting such iconic films as "The Revenant," "Woman Walks Ahead," "Blood Quantum," and more is currently looking for Native children ages 8 to 12 who want to audition for an upcoming musical animated series.

The Rene Haynes Casting announcement says it is searching for "series regular leads in an upcoming original animated series."

Indigenous casting will also be accompanied by an Indigenous crew. "We are delighted to say that this project was created by an Indigenous writer and will include Indigenous producers and writers," the casting agency wrote.

There is no travel necessary to audition and interested applicants can do remote recording.

Other details about the project include the following:

**SYNOPSIS:** Native American sibling trio John, Jill, and Jack have magical epic adventures in the national park they call home.

**SEEKING:** Children (age 8-12) who are good singers for the following roles.

**JOHN:** An Indigenous-Native American male, age 8 who sounds 8-10 years old. John is adventurous, fun-loving, resourceful, and a natural leader.

**JILL:** An Indigenous-Native American female, age 7 who sounds 6-8 years old. Always on the go, Jill is energetic, silly, optimistic, and will never say no to adventure.

[Click here to find out more information on how to apply.](#)



In this Dec. 8, 2019 photo, Drew Wilson auditions for Baby Shark at the Navajo Nation Museum in Window Rock, Ariz. Wilson traveled with her mom from Rock Point, Ariz., to audition for the roles of Baby Shark and Mama Shark for the Navajo version of Pinkfong's "Baby Shark." (Alma E. Hernandez/Gallup Independent via AP)



# Thanks For Reading!

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