

## **Inter Tribal Council of Arizona**

### **The Frank Harrison and Harry Austin Voting Rights Scholarship Essay Contest**

When it's not an election year, how will you stay engaged in the electoral process?

Many forget that American Indians/ Native Americans/ Indigenous Peoples of the United States are not just an ethnicity, we are a political entity. Staying involved in the electoral process isn't just a choice or hobby, it is a crucial part of being a tribal member. If we don't stay involved, sacred sites get destroyed, more of our people go missing and murdered, more Native American mascots show up, etc. This is why I pursued higher education at Arizona State University and chose to double major in American Indian Studies and Justice Studies. I am always educating myself on social issues that directly affect tribal communities and solutions to those issues. I make sure to stay connected with everyday news sources, follow social media sources that provide factual information that keep me in the loop and I also check in with my own tribal communities via youth council outlets and tribal district council meetings. Having this knowledge allows me to be prepared when election season comes around and helps me be of better service to my community by providing information on who to support. Indian country is dealing with various social issues, which is why we must know what each candidate represents and how they will be of service to us. Many tribal members are land protectors, water protectors and in this past year I experienced this fight first hand within my own ancestral territory. My community and I fought to protect A'al Wappia (Quitobaquito) our sacred spring from the border wall construction and during that time we desperately needed government officials help and they failed to provide that support. Leading to the destruction and desecration of our sacred

spring. Currently there are other tribal nations facing similar challenges to protect sacred sites, such as the Apache Stronghold protecting Oak flat, the Anishinaabe peoples protecting their sacred land from pipeline 3, Indigenous peoples of Hawaii protecting Mauna Kea from TMT telescope construction, etc. There has constantly been an up rise in Indian country to protect our sacred sites and we still are facing this problem today. We need to hold government officials accountable and use the power of our vote to only elect officials who will support our agenda and values as Indigenous peoples. Our ancestors fought so hard just for us to have this privilege, and now it is our duty and responsibility to use our voice each election to make a better future for generations to come.

When it is an election year, what will you do to encourage your family, friends, and community to participate in local, state, and national elections?

Non-tribal communities need to understand that Tribal Nations are a substantial political force that can make massive change when we vote. This is what I try to stress to my friends, family and communities. I grew up in a household with my mother who was the chairwoman of the Hia-Ced District for the Tohono O'odham Nation and my father who was the director of the Education Department for the Tohono O'odham Nation, both parents being heavily involved in our tribal government and community always stressed the importance of voting to our family. Both of my parents would volunteer for the Tohono O'odham Nation to help people vote during tribal elections and they would also volunteer in the Native Vote Election protection project during presidential elections. Which motivated me to do the same as I grew up. I have utilized my platform this past year as Miss Indigenous ASU 2020-2021 to speak on and share

information about the Native Vote and encourage my peers to go out and utilize their voices by voting. I have had the honor this past year as Miss Indigenous to participate in the Native Vote Election Protection Project and also encourage my friends to volunteer their time as well. I was stationed in District 5 of the Gila River Indian Community during the presidential election of 2020. I also was fortunate enough to be a speaker for “*Indian Country for Native Youth Emerging Leaders Virtual Roundtable*”, where I was able to share some history on Native Voting rights within the federal government and the state of Arizona. While also providing resources on voting on and off reservations, I spoke more specifically to my community, the Tohono O’odham Nation and the resources they have for voters. I try my best to be involved and assist my community during times of tribal, state and federal elections. Coming from a family of 9 sisters and 4 brothers, we do not fall short of voters and I help my mom and father during this time to get our family involved. My mom usually puts on a “voting day party” where we all come together, enjoy each other's company and send in our ballots together. I also help teach my 9 younger siblings the importance of having the right to vote since we didn't always have that right. Only through the resilience of Frank Harrison and Harry Austin are we able to have this incredible privilege to vote. I have and will continue to stress the importance of voting to Native communities and make sure to share the brave actions of Frank Harrison and Harry Austin, who motivate me in my efforts to be of service to others during the time of elections.