

Candice Joe

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The Frank Harrison and Harry Austin Voting Rights Scholarship Essay

In the Summer of 2020, I began interning at the Phoenix Indian Center primarily focusing on Civic Engagement, the 2020 Census, and Voter Registration. As an Intern, I was tasked with creating voter education materials to promote the Native vote and voter registration within the Phoenix Metropolitan area. These materials consisted of guides and information regarding voting made for all demographics, specifically Native youth. This experience was a learning opportunity to connect with my community, share the importance and impact of voting, understand voting disparities, and aid my personal development as a community member and public servant. Since then, I have continued to stay civically involved. Currently at the Phoenix Indian Center, I work to stay involved in my community and create other opportunities to increase voter registration for both Indigenous and Youth populations. As a Civic Engagement Intern, I have been able to spread awareness on the importance of the Native vote. In my time at the Phoenix Indian Center, I have seen the true impact of Indigenous communities. In the cultural and informational events held in the past and planned in the future by the Phoenix Indian Center, I have directly seen the power and devotion Indigenous communities have for wellness and improvement of their governments and policies. Through understanding voter registration guidelines, requirements, and deadlines, I have been able to help fellow community members to get registered. Additionally, my team recently held our first ever Civic Engagement Art Contest. A goal I sought to achieve through this art contest was to capture our community with art, promote voter engagement, and highlight Indigenous artists. This contest was a project that I

thought deeply about and worked hard to pull off because art is a valuable tool in inspiring and informing communities as it transcends boundaries that other mediums of awareness cannot reach. Not only is the medium powerful, but the empowerment and acknowledgement of Native artists is vital in uplifting communities and giving voices and opportunities. Specifically, the art contest pertained to the strength of the Native vote within Native communities and how it applies to tribal government. The art contest based its theme on the “Democracy is Indigenous” campaign from the 2020 election year. The campaign art depicted a woman wearing a jacket with pins that promote the Native vote and other Native organizations. Our team chose this as the base of the contest because this art was able to speak to not only returning voters, but also new voters, specifically Native youth. In addition to creating resources, being able to connect with new and returning voters is a vital ingredient in improving participation in elections. In order to promote voting participation within both demographics, providing information on these difficulties and hosting events for Native voters is essential to breaking these boundaries and creating an environment that opens the door for change. However, voter participation is met with more challenges and history. Understanding the history and hardships that have affected Indigenous elections is important to assessing and improving voter turnout and representation in Native communities. However, as communities have witnessed in the past, Indigenous communities and their voices in democracy result in change and new beginnings. Additionally, I am now an official registrar for the Navajo Nation tribal elections. This new role has allowed me to now advocate and be a resource for both the Maricopa County and Navajo Nation elections. This role has presented me with new responsibilities and obligations including being a readily available outlet for my community, representation for Native youth, and advocate for voter participation. All in all, voter registration and participation is extremely important and impactful

within Native communities and populations as it gives power to incite change through Native voices.