U.S. politician Deb Haaland is one of first Native American women to serve in the United States House of Representatives and the first Native American to become a Cabinet secretary.

**Who Is Deb Haaland?**

Deb Haaland is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna tribe who hails from New Mexico. A progressive Democrat, she successfully ran for Congress in 2018 and was re-elected in 2020. In December 2020, President Joe Biden nominated Haaland as his Secretary of the Interior. This position oversees public lands and manages the U.S. government's treaties and legal obligations to 574 federally recognized tribes. Haaland was confirmed in March 2021, making her the first Native American to be part of a president's Cabinet.

**When Was Deb Haaland Born?**

Debra Anne Haaland was born in Winslow, Arizona, on December 2, 1960.

**Family Background**

Haaland is a member of the Pueblo of Laguna tribe. The matrilineal tribe has been in what is now New Mexico since the 1200s. Due to this heritage, Haaland calls herself a 35th-generation New Mexican.

Haaland's mother, Mary Toya, was a Navy veteran who worked in Indian education at the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Toya made sure her children maintained a connection to their maternal grandparents. Haaland learned cooking from watching her grandmother and worked outside with her grandfather.

Haaland's father, John David Haaland, was a Norwegian American from Minnesota. He was awarded a Silver Star for his service in Vietnam as a U.S. Marine.

**Education and Career**

Since her father was in the military, Haaland and her family moved around a lot when she was young. As a result, she attended a dozen public schools before the family settled in Albuquerque. There, Haaland graduated from Highland High School in 1978.

Haaland worked for a bakery before enrolling at the University of New Mexico at 28. She graduated in 1994, and a few days after graduation, she gave birth to her daughter Somáh.

In 2003, Haaland started studying at the University of New Mexico School of Law, where she graduated in 2006.

As a single parent, Haaland faced financial difficulties. She had to apply for food stamps and struggled to find housing while attending law school. Haaland ran a salsa business so she could take care of her young daughter. "I couldn't afford child care and needed to make a living, so I started making salsa," [Haaland said in a 2021 interview](https://19thnews.org/2021/05/deb-haaland-interior-interview/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). "It was a way to have flexible working hours when my child was little."

From 2010 to 2015, Haaland served on the Laguna Development Corporation, which oversees business ventures for the Laguna nation. There, she became chair of the board.

**Early Political Actions**

[Haaland once told uPolitics](https://upolitics.com/ubio/rep-deb-haaland-bio-in-her-own-words-history-policies-record/) in 2019, "I got into politics because I really wanted more Native Americans to get out and vote."

Haaland volunteered on the presidential campaigns of John Kerry in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008. She served as Native American Vote Director for Obama's 2012 re-election campaign.

An Emerge New Mexico program helped train Haaland to run for office. She unsuccessfully ran for New Mexico's lieutenant governor in 2014. The following year, Haaland became chair of New Mexico's Democratic Party—she was the first Native American woman to lead a state party.

In 2016, Haaland took part in protests against a proposed pipeline that would go through a water source for the Standing Rock Reservation.

**Congressional Career**

In 2018, Haaland was elected to represent New Mexico's 1st Congressional District. She was sworn into the U.S. House of Representatives in January 2019 and became one of the first Native American women in Congress, along with fellow Democrat Sharice Davids of Kansas.

Haaland served on the House Natural Resources Committee and supported environmental legislation known as the Green New Deal. During her first term in Congress, Haaland worked on laws to address the ongoing issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women. She also backed legislation that bolstered hunting and fishing access and expanded outdoor recreation.

In November 2020, Haaland won re-election to a second term in Congress.

**Secretary of the Interior**

Democrat Joe Biden was elected president in November 2020. The following month, Haaland was named his pick for Secretary of the Interior.

In a speech accepting the nomination, Haaland [noted the importance of having a Native person in the role, saying](https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/2021-4-fall/feature/deb-haaland-living-testament), "This moment is profound when we consider the fact that a former secretary of the interior once proclaimed it his goal to, quote, 'civilize or exterminate' us. I'm a living testament to the failure of that horrific ideology."

Haaland's February 2021 confirmation hearings had contentious moments. The Secretary of the Interior oversees the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Given her stance on environmental issues, [some Republican senators questioned Haaland's suitability](https://www.ktvh.com/news/montana-politics/daines-other-gop-senators-interrogate-interior-nominee-haaland) for a position that oversees energy leases for gas and oil drilling on public lands. Haaland assured the Senate she would carry out President Biden's agenda.

Haaland was ultimately confirmed in a 51 to 40 vote on March 15, 2021, with support from four Republican senators. She was sworn into office three days later.

As Secretary of the Interior, Haaland set up the Missing & Murdered Unit in the Bureau of Indian Affairs to address the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women. She also announced an investigation into American Indian boarding schools. These schools, which operated in the 19th and 20th centuries, focused on forced assimilation and were often sites of abuse. Haaland's maternal grandparents were taken from their families and placed in such schools.

Haaland has [stated that addressing climate change](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/deb-haaland-interior-department-goals/) is another of her priorities for the Interior Department.

**Personal Life**

Haaland has been sober for more than 30 years.

**Is Deb Haaland Married?**

In August 2021, Haaland and longtime partner Skip Sayre married in New Mexico.