

HRSA TAC biographies

Chuck Hoskin Jr.

Chuck Hoskin Jr. is the Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation, the country's largest tribal government with more than 380,000 tribal citizens. He was elected in 2019. Prior to being elected principal chief, he served as the Cherokee Nation secretary of state.

As principal chief, Mr. Hoskin has increased minimum wage at Cherokee Nation and Cherokee Nation businesses and secured the largest language investment in the tribe's history to expand Cherokee language education and preservation. Chief Hoskin also appointed the tribe's first delegate to the U.S. Congress; doubled Cherokee Nation's funding for career tech education; and established the Housing, Jobs, and Sustainable Communities Act to repair hundreds of homes for Cherokees elders and public community buildings across the tribe's reservation.

Additionally, as secretary of state, Chief Hoskin worked to secure funding from the federal government to fund a billion-dollar joint venture investment in better health care for all Cherokees. He has also served as Cherokee Nation's strongest advocate on sovereignty protection.

He formerly served as a member of the Council of the Cherokee Nation, representing District 11 for 6 years, and served his final 2 years as deputy speaker. On the Council, he worked with his fellow council members to start building homes for Cherokees again, increased education funding, and sponsored legislation to expand health care service through casino dollars.

Chief Hoskin has testified at the United Nations on behalf of Cherokee Nation and serves on multiple boards and commissions, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary's Tribal Advisory Committee.

Chief Hoskin is from the Vinita community. He and First Lady January Hoskin are parents to two children, Triston and Jasmine. He graduated from the University of Oklahoma and the University of Oklahoma College of Law and is a member of the Cherokee Nation and Oklahoma Bar Associations.

Rhoda Jensen

Rhoda Jensen, Naats'ée, is Tlingit and Iñupiaq. She is of the Sheetka Kaagwaantaan (Eagle Moiety/Killerwhale Wolf clan) and has lived in Yakutat for the last 29 years. Ms. Jensen has worked for the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe for the past 22 years. She recently became the chief executive officer of the Yakutat Community Health Center (YCHC), after having served as the executive health director for the last 12 years.

Under Ms. Jensen's leadership, the YCHC's annual budget increased from \$1.3 million to over \$12 million. In 2015, Ms. Jensen led the initiative to apply for the Indian Health Service Joint Venture Construction Program and competed against 36 applicants across the nation to become one of seven tribes who were awarded that year. Since construction completed in 2020, the YCHC now delivers services in a 22,000 square foot, state-of-the-art health center facility.

Ms. Jensen continues to improve and expand health services within the community. A natural teacher who values the importance of education, she believes in "growing our own" by offering apprenticeship opportunities for paraprofessionals. To date, tribal and community members have successfully completed or are currently enrolled in the following programs: the certified medical assistant apprenticeship, the community health aide program, the dental health aide technician program, and the behavioral health aide program.

Recently, Ms. Jensen said, "Just because someone might not believe in it, doesn't mean it won't happen. To the younger generation: always set goals and go after it. It's OK if people disagree or scoff at you. It just makes you stronger and work harder to make it happen."

Jonathan Nez

Jonathan Nez currently serves as the President of Navajo Nation. He was born and raised on the Navajo Nation. His family is from Shonto, AZ, and he is Áshjǫ́hí (Salt People), born for Ta'neezahnii (Tangle clan). His maternal grandfather's clan is Tódich'íí'nii (Bitter Water Clan), and his paternal grandfather's clan is the Táchii'nii (Red-Running-Into-The-Water Clan). He and his wife Phefelia Nez have two children, Christopher and Alexander.

President Nez began his political career after being elected as Shonto Chapter vice president. He was later elected to serve three terms as a Navajo Nation council delegate, representing the communities of Shonto, Oljato, Tsah Bii Kin, and Navajo Mountain. President Nez was also elected as a District 1 supervisor for the Navajo County Board of Supervisors and served two terms.

President Nez believes strongly in education. He is in pursuit of a doctoral degree in political science and has completed research on local empowerment and mobilizing local communities of Navajo Nation to reinstate their inherent local way of governance. His research focuses on the reduction of dependence on the central tribal government, and upholding and enhancing the local inherent sovereignty of the chapter areas. Most importantly, President Nez believes that education and leadership should be guided by the Navajo wellness model grounded in the Diné principles of Nitsáhákees (thinking), Nahat'á (planning), liná (life), and Sihasin (stability of restoration of balance and harmony through reflection).

He received his Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science from Northland Pioneer College and his Masters of Public Administration degree from Northern Arizona University.

President Nez is an avid runner and advocates for healthy living. He enjoys training for and participating in long-distance events and has participated in multiple marathons, including the Black Canyon 100K Ultra. President Nez participated in the 2018 Running for a Stronger and Healthier Navajo Nation: Running for Resilience, a 403-mile run from Fort Sumner, NM, to Window Rock, AZ, in commemoration of the 150th year of the Naaltsoos Sani (Navajo Nation Treaty) – a 14-day run he dedicated to the resiliency and strength of our ancestors to revitalize the Diné way of life and teachings.

After serving as vice president, he became the youngest president of Navajo Nation on January 15, 2019. As president, he continues to promote the teaching of “T'áá hwó' ajít'éego,” which means self-reliance or self-determination for us as individuals. He strongly believes that this powerful teaching is what drives us, as individuals, to work hard every day and pursue what we want in life. Working together, he believes we can create the positive change for us as individuals and for our communities.

Kira Norton

Kira Norton is a member of Hoopa Valley Tribe of California. Ms. Norton currently serves as the assistant health director, benefits coordinator, claims administrator, and tribal appointee for the California Rural Indian Health Board. In this capacity, she focuses on helping Native and non-Native employees and their dependents navigate patient care through Blue Lake Rancheria Health Plan's self-insured health plan and United Indian Health Services' direct services and patient referred care program. Ms. Norton has helped the tribal community get access to COVID-19 testing, education, and vaccination. While serving as the tribal appointee for Blue Lake Rancheria, she actively participates and listens to tribal nations' unmet health care needs.

Ms. Norton graduated from the University of California, Merced, in 2018 with a Bachelor of Arts in Public Health. There, she served as an epidemiology research assistant for the research project finding for the BRACA genes in women and the research project examining the rate of suicide attempts in California Native adolescents. She currently serves as a board member for Changing Tides, a service that provides mental health assistance and childcare assistance for families with disabilities and low-income families. Ms. Norton's work focuses on health education outreach, advocating for access to care, and improving health care quality outcomes for tribal nations.

Aaron Payment

Aaron Payment, EdD, EdS, MEd, MPA, is serving in his fourth four-year term as Chairperson for the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. Prior to this role, he served as the tribal vice chairperson for two terms and was a member of the Tribal Council.

Chairperson Payment holds various tribal leadership positions. He served previously as first vice president for the National Congress of American Indians and current serves as recording secretary. Prior to this position, he served as the secretary and Midwest regional vice president. He also serves as acting president of the Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes, president of the United Tribes of Michigan, and chair of the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan.

Chairperson Payment currently serves on several national Native advisory councils including: the National Advisory Council on Indian Education, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary's Tribal Advisory Council, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Tribal Advisory Council, the Nation Institutes of Health Tribal Advisory, and the Tribal Interior Budget Committee (Midwest co-chair). Past appointments include the HHS Office of Minority Health Research Advisory Council (chair).

Chairperson Payment has served as faculty and the Title III retention grant administrator for Lake Superior State University. His past roles include deputy executive director of Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, federal/state policy administrator, minority retention coordinator for Northern Michigan University, and Native American student coordinator for Michigan State University.

Kathy Pierre

Kathy Pierre is an elected official for Lummi Indian Business Council, serving as the treasurer. Prior to serving on the tribal council, Ms. Pierre has worked for Lummi Nation in a multitude of areas in workforce and community development, to include grant management, since 2001. Her focus areas consist of poverty reduction and job creation.

Most notable of her accomplishments, Ms. Pierre was responsible for building a daycare for teen mothers who cared for their infants while maintaining their educational plans and completing high school. She was also responsible for the planning and construction of a business incubator to inspire entrepreneurship and job creation.

Ms. Pierre was awarded for her work in community development from the Bellingham Opportunity Council in 2005. She served her community as a member of the Planning Commission, a member of the Gaming Commission, and as the chairwoman of the Tribal Employment Rights Ordinance Commission.

Ms. Pierre graduated with honors from Northwest Indian College with an Associate of Arts and Science degree in 2000, followed by a Bachelor of Arts and Science degree in American Cultural Studies in 2001 from Western Washington University. She is now a graduate candidate for a Masters of Public and Tribal Administration from Evergreen State College.

Ms. Pierre's career path reflects on her life's journey as a daughter, single mother, commercial fisher, public servant, and tribal leader. Her philosophy is that the success of a person is contingent upon the following: Train them with the best programs, empower them to act, recognize and reward them, and then get out of their way. She resides on the Lummi Reservation in Bellingham, WA, and is a proud mother of two beautiful children.

Lee Spoonhunter

Lee Spoonhunter is an enrolled member of Northern Arapaho Tribe in Wyoming. Chairman Spoonhunter is the Co-Chairman of the Northern Arapaho Tribe. He is also a member of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) and Secretary's TAC. He is honored to join the HRSA TAC.

Mr. Spoonhunter served as chairman of the Northern Arapaho Business Council from 2018 to 2020. Prior to this role, he served in the capacity of co-chair from 2018 to 2020 and member from 2016 to 2018.

His primary work experience is with TANF and child support. He was an economic assistance specialist and director for the Northern Arapaho TANF program, director for the Northern Arapaho Tribal Native Employment Works division, director of the Northern Arapaho Tribal Child Support program, and higher education director for Northern Arapaho Sky People. Through the Tribal Child Support program, Mr. Spoonhunter was responsible for ensuring the program met the needs of the Arapaho people. He has also worked as a tribal consultant for various tribes in the areas of tribal TANF and tribal child support.

Mr. Spoonhunter attended Casper College and Central Wyoming College in Wyoming.

Selwyn Whiteskunk

Selwyn Whiteskunk is a member of Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and a veteran of the U.S. Army. Mr. Whiteskunk has extensive experience in tribal governmental functions, from local to federal issues. He became the vice chairman of the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe Tribal Council in 2019, having previously served as a council member, treasurer, and chairman.

Mr. Whiteskunk advocates on behalf of Ute Mountain Ute Tribe in many affairs, such as for natural resources, health care, economic development, education, and American Indian issues, through the various committees he serves and his past work experience. He has served on the board of directors for Utah Indian Health Advisory Board (board chairman), Albuquerque Indian Health Board, Native American Bank, Native American Finance Officers Association, National Indian Education Association, and the 10 River Tribes Consortium. He was also a member of the National Indian Health Board, Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs, Colorado Behavioral Health Task Force, and the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention Tribal Advisory Council.

He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Business Management from Ft. Lewis College and is working toward his Masters in Public Health from the University of Utah. He also attended the Tribal Energy Management seminar series from San Juan College.

Larry Wright Jr.

Larry Wright Jr. is the current Tribal Chairman of the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. He has served 10 years in this role. He also currently serves as the area vice president for the Great Plains Region on the National Congress of American Indians Board of Directors and the National Indian Health Board. Further, Chairman Wright was recently elected as chairman of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs Board of Commissioners and is chair of the Nebraska Intertribal Coalition.

With a background in education and management, Mr. Wright has extensive knowledge of tribal sovereignty issues that afflict Indian Country today. Previously, he was a high school social studies teacher with Lincoln Public Schools. He is also a veteran.