



News Release

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For Immediate Release

2017 PUBLIC POLICY FELLOW COHORT MARKS 10 YEARS OF BRIDGING STATE OF ALASKA GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ALASKA NATIVE COMMUNITIES

January 20, 2017

(Anchorage, Alaska) – First Alaskans Institute (FAI) is pleased to announce our tenth cohort of Public Policy Fellows to directly engage with on-the-ground legislative and political processes within the Alaska Legislature and Executive Branch of Alaska state government. This fellowship immerses Native leaders within the state lawmaking process to deepen their understanding of Alaska’s issues, expand their leadership capabilities, and ensure space for their voices and the Native, community, and cultural knowledge they carry to be shared with policy makers, other statewide leadership, and policy influencers active in the policy making arena.

“These fellows are selected because they have the character, dedication, and spirit to jump right in and swim upstream in the crucible of state law creation,” said Elizabeth Medicine Crow, President/CEO of FAI. “As high caliber performers, the expectation is for the fellows to be hard working members of their teams, and be active in advancing the work of their respective offices in a substantial and meaningful way.”

Since FAI first launched the Public Policy Fellowship in 2008, 26 fellows have been placed in 12 legislative offices and 1 executive office creating a critical learning environment and immersive growth experience where fellows become more knowledgeable and interested in governmental leadership. Many have continued on to pursue careers and community leadership roles directly utilizing their fellowship experience and to get involved in high level policy making and in political affairs at the local, Tribal, State, Federal and International levels.

Public Policy Fellows bring with them a high level of community engagement and a strong cultural foundation that allows them to take on this responsibility with thoughtfulness and dedication in order to add value to their offices, thereby serving the people of Alaska. Their efforts to further hone their leadership and hands-on problem solving skills through this fellowship make them even more informed and engaged community advocates to serve their own Tribal Nations and all citizens of Alaska in whatever endeavor they pursue.

We thank the Lt. Governor, Senator, and Representatives, as well as their entire staff, for being such wonderful hosts and mentors for our fellows, and for giving them the ability to really contribute to your critical work on behalf of your constituents and Alaska.

We are proud to announce the 2017 cohort of FAI Public Policy Fellows:



Elizabeth Rexford

Elizabeth Rexford (Iñupiaq) is a tribal member of Utqiaġvik (Barrow) and grew up in Utqiaġvik and Fairbanks. Her Iñupiaq name is Nauravaraq and she comes from a large family that loves to celebrate their Iñupiaq culture and traditions together. Elizabeth also has strong interests in Alaska Native Games, distance cycling and winter sports. She plans to use her knowledge and experiences in the business and environmental sectors to seek ways to expand community development, crafting Arctic policy to improve the lives of those in her home community and across Alaska. Elizabeth completed a BA from Dartmouth College in Environmental Studies in 2010 and is a current member of the Leadership Anchorage cohort. Elizabeth is placed with Representative Dean Westlake of Kotzebue.

James Hart

James Hart (Tlingit) has family ties to Haines and is a tribal citizen of the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida. His Tlingit name is Gooch Éesh, and he is an Eagle Thunderbird from the Chilkat Valley and is the grandchild of the Raven Frog Sun House on the Stikine River. In addition to experiences as a commercial fisherman and fisheries technician, James has pursued an active hunting and fishing lifestyle in Southeast Alaska. James has also been actively involved in traditional canoe paddling, and participated as an apprentice carver under Wayne Price in Xúna Káawu (Hoonah). He has a strong heart for community involvement through being an active volunteer at his local school, a dance group member and mentors Tlingit youth to embrace Tlingit language and customs. He currently serves on the Chilkat Indian Association Tribal Council, is a delegate to the Tlingit and Haida General Assembly, and is a member of the Alaska Native Brotherhood. He plans to catalyze this fellowship specifically in order to bolster his experience in governance and administration to one day eventually lead his tribe. James is placed in the Office of Representative Jonathan Kreiss-Tomkins of Sitka.



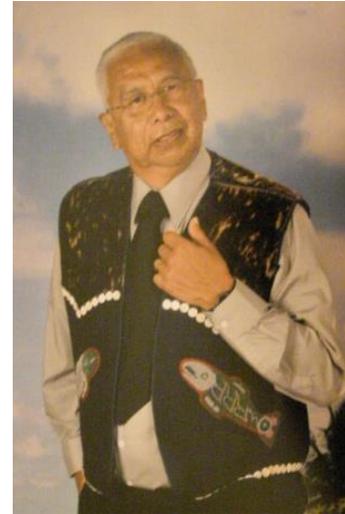
Meghan Topkok

Meghan Topkok (Iñupiaq) is a member of the Native Village of Ambler and grew up between the Bering Straits region and Oregon. Her Iñupiaq name is Sigvanna. As a third year law student at the University of Oregon School of Law, she plans to build upon this fellowship experience to enact her goal of returning back to Alaska to utilize her legal education to assist tribes in asserting their sovereignty as safeguards for their own cultural values, traditions and ways of life, which she views as paramount. She seeks every opportunity to celebrate and use her Iñupiaq language, dance, songs, and foods based upon her homelands and traditions.

Megan’s learning and advocacy on behalf of Indian law and climate change issues, as well as her leadership role as current President of the National Native American Law Students Association, provide a strong foundation for this effort after graduating law school and establishing herself back in Alaska. Before completing her BA in Native American Studies from Dartmouth College in 2014, Meghan was a 2012 FAI Summer Intern placed at Kawerak, Inc. in Nome. Meghan is placed in the Office of the Lieutenant Governor, Byron Mallott of Yakutat.

John Hanlon

John Hanlon (Tlingit) is a tribal citizen of the Tlingit and Haida Central Council of Alaska. His Tlingit name is Yéil Xaagú and he is a Raven Coho from the Xixchi' Hit Frog Coming out of Hibernation House. He brings extensive knowledge of safety, supervision, and training related to mining operations and the natural resource sector. He recently completed his BA at the University of Alaska, Southeast in Alaska Native Languages and Studies and is pursuing a Master of Arts in Rural Development through the University of Alaska, Fairbanks. As a clan house leader, he prioritizes clan house history, language learning and promoting the ongoing practice of sacred cultural events in order to ground himself, his clan and other community members in their Tlingit culture. He considers himself a lifelong learner, and plans to use this fellowship to connect critical learning and cultural growth experiences for himself and others. John is placed with Senator Donny Olson of Golovin.



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First Alaskans Institute is a statewide Alaska Native non-profit dedicated to the advancement of the Alaska Native community. Our mission is *'True to identity, heritage, and values, Alaska Natives are informed and engaged in leading the decisions that shape the future.'*