



SAIGE SPRING NEWSLETTER - MAY 2026



A MESSAGE FROM OUR SAIGE CHAIR ED BLAUVELT



Hello everyone! I hope this message finds you well as we head into spring. The start of a new year always fills me with excitement. This year especially feels full of new possibilities and opportunities for us to further develop our ideas and continue the work that we are passionate about.

The SAIGE Board has already started work on our 2026–2028 Strategic Plan. This planning process will help us determine how SAIGE can continue to offer valuable resources to our members and how we can adapt to better serve Native American and Alaska Native professionals working in government. Throughout the summer and fall, we will be reaching out to the membership to hear your thoughts. We want to know what you need support with, what challenges you are currently facing, and what you want SAIGE to look like in the future.

While the environment across government continues to shift, SAIGE remains committed to providing high-quality professional development opportunities that support our workforce and mission. Watch for more details on virtual training throughout the year and for scholarship announcements. These things will help us to continue to implement our mission during uncertain times.

We know that government-wide, the landscape is constantly changing. Despite the hurdles we continue to face, SAIGE remains committed to offering members excellent professional development opportunities to support our workforce.

We know many of you, where you are right now, might not see much light at the end of the tunnel. But throughout SAIGE's history, we have been most effective when we embrace change and have a clear purpose moving forward. At SAIGE, we won't shy away from the difficult topics. We will support, develop, and strengthen Native American and Alaska Native professionals throughout the federal government.

Spring is a time for renewal. I know that with your help and input, we can brighten the road ahead. Thank you for your continued service and dedication to the SAIGE mission.

Remembering Native Warriors on Memorial Day

by Ed Blauvelt

Every year, Americans spend Memorial Day remembering and honoring loved ones who died while serving our country. While we all feel the impact of these losses, Memorial Day holds special meaning for Native people. It reminds us of our ancestors who have made the ultimate sacrifice defending freedom and liberty for generations before the United States was even established. Native people have always been warriors, fighting to protect their families, homelands, and the sacred duties bestowed upon them by the Creator.

Native Americans have served in every conflict from the Revolutionary War to today's wars abroad at a ratio higher than most ethnic groups in the country. Both men and women from Tribal Nations have answered the call to serve during wartime, despite the United States denying basic rights, citizenship, and recognition to their people. Native Americans have served in every branch of the military and in every capacity, from horseback warriors to fighter jet pilots. Being a warrior means serving your country with courage and sacrificing yourself to protect future generations.

This Memorial Day, we remember and honor our Native sons and daughters who made the ultimate sacrifice in combat and never returned home. We remember the Native scouts, code talkers, infantrymen, convoy drivers, pilots, medics, sailors, special operators, and all the other warriors who put themselves in harm's way for fellow Americans. We think of the warrior who left behind the warmth of their family and community to fight and gave their all for the brothers and sisters standing beside them in battle. They did not die in vain, and we will never forget their names. Nor will we forget them because remembrance stretches far beyond words spoken on Memorial Day. Our remembrance lives in our songs, our dances, our prayers, and our ceremonies. When the drum sings, it echoes the heartbeat of those who have gone on before us. Memory is carried by every honor song sung. Every time an eagle feather is lifted to the sky, gratitude is carried on its downy plumes. Every veteran dance and song performed on powwow grounds reminds us that our warriors stand with us still.

Many of our warriors have returned to the Creator, but their memory will always be woven into our history. Their bravery lives on in our veterans who continue to walk proudly at Grand Entry. Their legacy lives on in the youth learning what it means to have honor and serve others. We remember them through the family members who still possess photographs, stories, medals, and memories of their loved ones who helped shape our great nation.

Memorial Day isn't just about grieving. It's about celebrating legacy, too. Native warriors have shown us that true strength is commanding respect while remaining humble, and that being a true warrior means fighting for others, not glory. When you spend time with family, community, and fellow veterans this Memorial Day, never forget the sacrifices made by those who gave their lives serving this country. Speak the names of fallen warriors with respect, and honor them through your prayers, songs, dances, and service to others. And teach future generations that Native warriors fought and died to help shape this country and defend the beautiful land we all call home.

Their watch may be over, but their spirit will live on.

SAIGE STUDENT PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: WILLY BASS

Serving as the SAIGE Student Coordinator has been an incredibly rewarding experience, allowing me to connect with countless inspiring students. In this edition, I am thrilled to spotlight one of our outstanding SAIGE Student Alumni: Willy Bass. His journey highlights the significant impact our program has had and serves as a powerful motivation for students to pursue excellence. Willy's remarkable leadership and communication skills truly set him apart as a student leader.

JoAnn Brant, Student Program Coordinator



Willy Bass presenting on workforce development and career planning to a group of freshman business majors at Morningside University, Sioux City, IA

SAIGE: A Vital Part of My Journey **Willy Bass, M.Ed.**

Hizakisana, hinikaragi wina. Hocak rasja Masja Mani ga higairena. Maixete rasja Willy Bass ga higairena. I greet you all. My name is Willy Bass; my Hocak ceremonial name is Walks with Purpose. I am a member of the Huc Hikikarac (Bear Clan) of the Hocak Nisoc Haci (Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska). My parents are Greg and Janet Bass. My paternal grandparents are Cecil Lloyd Bass and Joyce Whitebeaver. My maternal grandparents are Peter John Snake LaPointe and Viola Elizabeth Rave.

I have been happily married to my partner for 16 years. We have five dogs and one cat, and we currently live in Sioux City, IA. My favorite hobbies include playing volleyball, cooking for my family, and traveling to new places with friends and family.

I have fond memories of attending the SAIGE conference back in 2011 and 2012 as a student. I made lifelong connections with people whom I still consider my friends today. As a result of this expanded network, I have reunited with some at later conferences, participated in research with some who entered graduate and doctoral

programs, and shared and learned about scholarship and employment opportunities across tribal communities. In addition, my understanding of educational and employment opportunities with the Government and in our tribal communities increased through SAIGE conference breakout sessions, networking, learning experiences, group projects, leadership development activities, discussions about needs in Indian Country, and the overall representation of indigenous people who work and have worked in the federal government workforce.

SAIGE has taught me that Native representation in the Government is not only possible but is critical. Attending the conference gave me the confidence to continue contributing my skills and talents to make Indian Country a better place, starting with my own Tribe.

Currently, I am the manager of Community Impact and Engagement at Ho-Chunk, Inc., which is the award-winning economic development corporation for the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska. I have been employed there for over eight years. My team and I operate several youth, education, elder, and workforce development programs, including internships, scholarships, apprenticeships, community impact projects, and community volunteerism.

I also apply leadership across multiple boards and committees I currently serve on, including the Little Priest Tribal College Board of Trustees, Winnebago Comprehensive Healthcare System Board of Directors, Winnebago Health Foundation Board, Boys & Girls Club of Siouxland Board, Leadership Siouxland Board, and more.

SAIGE has been a vital part of my journey, and I am forever grateful for the connections made, leadership skills and wisdom I gained through the organization. Wishing all the current participants well in their future endeavors! May the Creator bless you and your families.



Willy Bass as a Student Program participant at SAIGE in Tulsa, OK, 2011. Seen here with Page Miller and Natasha Myhal.

SAIGE MEMBER PROFILE : FREDERICKA JOSEPH

You no doubt have had the opportunity to see, hear from or meet Founding Board member and current Vice-Chair, Fredericka Joseph. She has been integral to the growth, integrity, and the character of SAIGE and is a great ambassador for the organization. When asked, she recently shared some insights into her journey for those who don't know her.



I am a proud enrolled member of the Kaw Nation of Oklahoma. I also have Cherokee lineage based on my mother being a member of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. I am proud to acknowledge that my upbringing from the age of two months until I entered college was based on living

on five reservations. This created a valuable lesson to me about the different traditions and the culture of those tribes I grew up with. My dad worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs after he returned from World War II and he returned to work as a civil service until he retired. My family consisted of an older sister and a brother who was sandwiched between the two girls of the family!

I attended Idaho State University where I met my husband. He was commissioned as an officer when he graduated from college and in September 1972 he entered the Army. I didn't know at the time but I also joined it with him! We were fortunate to be assigned to wonderful assignments. Our first was in Augsburg, Germany, his next assignment was Fort Huachuca, Arizona, then on to Misawa, Japan, Fort Meade, Maryland, Ansbach, Germany, and back to Fort Meade where my husband completed his twenty years of

service. These years were the best of our lives as we had two children along the way.

I became a member of SAIGE when my boss, who was the Director for EEO at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, was serving as SAIGE Secretary. His schedule became overwhelming so he asked me if I would take the role and I agreed. That's when I became a Lifetime member. I served as Secretary for a few years then eventually as Vice Chair. In 2015, I was elected as the Chair. I served as the SAIGE Chair for ten years and am currently the Vice Chair. All our board positions as Officers and Directors are voluntary. We all work full-time jobs until we retire. We do this because of the importance of the work SAIGE does. Over half of the board, at least now, are retired so we are always recruiting for Director positions.

I began my federal career as a GS-3 and over the years of relocating due to my husband's career, I would start over just to get back into the federal family. I eventually changed my career path from Social Services positions to the Equal Employment Opportunity sector. I retired as a GS-15 having taken six years off to be a stay-at-home mom. I believed in being flexible and willing to move around. Timing always seemed to be my friend as well!

I'm proud to be an Indigenous woman and to have a family like SAIGE. I am also a Lifetime member of the Federally Employed Women. I encourage employees to look at joining other national organizations for professional growth.

SAIGE Co-Sponsors National Webinar

By Luke Jones

Over the past year, SAIGE has partnered with the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) to co-sponsor several webinars under the title, "Current Trends in State-Tribal Relations." A highlight of this collaboration was an interactive lecture on Wednesday, March 18, 2026 by renowned Indian law and policy scholar Philip "Sam" Deloria. The webinar title was, "How Tribes Entered the Modern Intergovernmental System" and described processes that expanded the number of federal programs that recognized tribes as governments. According to Mr. Deloria, "Until the advent of the Great Society, tribal governments for the most part dealt only with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Indian Health Service within the federal government. But as domestic assistance programs grew in importance in the late 60's, tribes soon saw the potential importance to tribal development of these other programs and agencies."

Mr. Sam Deloria, a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, is one of the most influential figures in modern federal Indian policy, tribal self-governance, and the art of applying theory to practice when protecting the rights of American Indian tribes and their citizens. For 35 years he served as Director of the American Indian Law Center (AILC), the oldest, most influential Indian-managed and Indian-controlled legal and public policy organization in the country, hosted at the University of New Mexico. He also helped develop the first Tribal Masters in Public Administration (MPA) program at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington where students specialize in Tribal-State relations and issues of relevance to tribal governance, management, and leadership. Deloria was also one of the founders of the Commission on State-Tribal Relations (CSTR), the first organized national attempt to study the state-tribal relationship, and the principles it developed remain relevant to intergovernmental systems management.



Sam was introduced by ASPA President John Bartle and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) President James Christian-Anderson - SAIGE Secretary Luke Jones moderated the webinar. About 200 people participated in the online forum from across the country, including several of Sam's former students and colleagues. The recurring forum is managed by the ASPA Section on Intergovernmental Administration and Management "Tribal Relations Working Group" and this webinar was co-sponsored by SAIGE and the NAPA Standing Panel on Intergovernmental Systems. Learn more about the "Tribal Relations Working Group" online at www.linktr.ee/TribalRelations.

SAIGE February 27, 2026 Membership Meeting

SAIGE held its first general membership meeting since last year's virtual National Training Program on Friday, February 27, 2026. The meeting was hosted by eight members of the SAIGE Board of Directors and attended by more than thirty of our active members; we are grateful for the active participation of all those who joined us.

SAIGE Chair Ed Blauvelt provided opening comments and thanked the membership on behalf of the entire Board. We next introduced the newly elected Board members, thanked all who participated in the election, and summarized the successful 2025 virtual NTP. Longtime Board member Lori Windle provided an excellent background on SAIGE strategic planning efforts and the individual "mission pillars" that have informed the organization for many years. These are: (1) To promote the recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of American Indian and Alaska Native government employees, and work to ensure their equal treatment under the law; (2) To educate Federal agencies in the history and obligations of the Federal Indian Trust responsibility and to assist them in its implementation; (3) To assist government agencies in the development and delivery of initiatives and programs that honor the unique Federal-Tribal relationship; and (4) To provide a national forum for issues and topics affecting American Indian and Alaska Native government employees.

Finally, SAIGE reviewed and distributed a membership survey to inform short and long-term SAIGE priorities. Ideas generated include: expand scope to include elected officials - legislators play an important governmental role; focus training on contemporary real world issues, not just historical information; expand scope to state, local, and especially tribal governments - reduce focus on the federal sector; expand to include regional and online trainings, not just national in person training; coordinate training with other groups - tribal organizations as well as the National Coalition for Equity in the Public Service (NCEPS); and so much more.

Please reach out to us to make sure your membership is in good standing or to update your contact information - and THANK YOU to all our wonderful SAIGE Members! (memberships@saige.org)

SAIGE Memberships & Board Service Opportunities

From SAIGE Secretary, Luke Jones

Did you know that SAIGE has more than 150 lifetime members? We want to thank all our members and encourage everyone with an expired or annual membership to consider becoming a Lifetime Member. Your SAIGE membership signals a strong organization and provides the incentive we need to keep working toward our goals. As a Lifetime Member, you won't have to renew each year and our overall membership numbers will remain more stable over time. SAIGE has been blessed to gain annual memberships at our National Training Program and we won't see new memberships from that forum until we get back to our in-person meetings. All members who would like to serve on the SAIGE Board must have been a member for at least the previous full year, so having a Lifetime Membership will assure you remain Board eligible. Also, we encourage all members who are curious about Board service opportunities to contact a current Board member to talk about your interests and learn more about how we work behind the scenes. As part of the SAIGE family founders cohort, my time in service to SAIGE has been one of the most rewarding of my thirty-plus year government service career! Contact us with questions via email at memberships@saige.org.



The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE)
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Dedicated to the recruitment, retention, development, and advancement of American Indian and Alaska Native Government Employees
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Next Gen of Tribal Self-Governance: Turning Change into Opportunity

By Jay Spaan

The 2026 Tribal Self-Governance Conference gathered Tribal leaders, federal officials, advocates, and partners from across Indian Country for several days of collaboration, learning, and discussion about advancing Tribal Self-Governance and sovereignty. This year's event took place at Wild Horse Pass Resort & Casino and welcomed 1,560 attendees from over 300 Tribal Nations, as well as many federal agencies and organizations dedicated to building stronger government-to-government relationships with Tribes.



The conference included a strong lineup of speakers and leaders, such as HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., U.S. Senator Ruben Gallego, DOI Associate Deputy Secretary Mike Olsen, DOT Assistant Secretary James Crawford, and Tribal leaders from across the country. Their involvement sparked important conversations about the future of Self-Governance, Tribal priorities, and ways to improve how federal programs and services reach Tribal communities.



Over 100 presenters and panelists took part in breakout sessions and group discussions on topics important to Tribal Nations. These included expanding Self-Governance authority, healthcare, funding, public lands, workforce development, transportation, new technologies, and creative Tribal projects.

Attendees gained useful information, practical strategies, and chances to share experiences that will help strengthen Self-Governance across the country.

The conference also premiered four new episodes from the For Our People: Stories of Tribal Self-Governance and Sovereignty documentary series. After each screening, attendees joined lively Q&A panels with Tribal leaders, participants, and partners featured in the stories. These sessions gave everyone a chance to learn more about the impacts and successes shown in the films.

Attendees were invited to a special ribbon cutting and tour hosted by the Gila River Indian Community to showcase its new Public Safety facility. The event highlighted the Community's ongoing investments in public safety and new services that help protect its citizens.

Along with the educational sessions, attendees enjoyed several memorable cultural and networking events. The evening reception at the Heard Museum gave everyone a special chance to gather and celebrate in a top museum for Native art and culture. Participants also had fun at a lively lunch performance by Lil Mike & Funny Bone, whose energy and music added to the excitement of the event.

Conference attendees also had the opportunity to participate in a full-day cultural workshop led by Sue Morris and Cynthia Masterson, where participants learned traditional beading and fringing techniques in an engaging, hands-on environment.

The success of the 2026 conference shows the ongoing growth of the Tribal Self-Governance movement and the shared commitment of Tribal Nations and partners to advancing Tribal sovereignty and building stronger Self-Governance for future generations.

America's 250th Anniversary and Our People's Influence on its Founding and Future

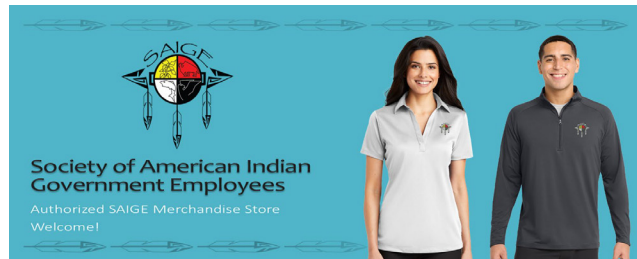
By Ed Blauvelt

As we near America's 250th year of independence, it is important to remember that Native Nations influenced ideas of governance, diplomacy, and stewardship that helped shape the country we know today. Native people have contributed to the construction of this country, its communities and institutions, and public service, since the beginning of this nation.

SAIGE salutes the generations of Native ancestors who came before us and laid the groundwork for leadership. We also celebrate the Native professionals serving in federal agencies today who continue to build upon and strengthen the federal workforce, as well as this country's unique relationship with Tribal Nations. Moreover, we recognized our Youth who take a giant leap of faith to serve in government, paving the way for future Native leaders and shaping America's path forward. Additionally, we are indebted to the Warriors who stood and fought, at times sacrificing their lives, in the most arduous circumstances to secure a better tomorrow for their families, their children, and the next seven generations. Likewise, we offer our sincere gratitude to the retirees who spent their careers working to improve relations between tribes and the government, and who ensured that programs and services were delivered to those tribal nations and communities to which they were due. SAIGE has always sought to bring visibility and assistance to those doing this honorable work.

Together, we remember, celebrate, and push forward.

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All items are at cost, with no profit to SAIGE.

Any questions or comments, please reach out to us at info@saige.org.

Talking Leaf Newsletter

The Talking Leaf Newsletter is issued twice a year - Spring and Fall. SAIGE welcomes your stories, suggestions, and ideas. If you want to contribute to the newsletter, please email Georgia Madrid at **newsletter@saige.org**

SAIGE Board of Directors

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- Chair: Ed Blauvelt (Muskogee/Mohawk Descent)
- Vice Chair: Fredericka Joseph (Kaw Nation)
- Secretary: Luke Jones (Chickahomeny and Pamunkey Indians of Virginia)
- Treasurer: Sue Morris (Comanche Nation of Oklahoma)

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- Phil Hamel
- Georgeie Reynolds
- Jay Spaan (Cherokee Nation)
- Lori Windle (White Earth Chippewa)

<https://saige.org/home/board-members/>

About SAIGE

The Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) is the first national non-profit organization representing American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) Federal, Tribal, State and local government employees. Formed in 2002, SAIGE provides a forum on the issues, challenges and opportunities of American Indian Tribal Nations and the government workforce, and to foster a professional network among AI/AN government employees.

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