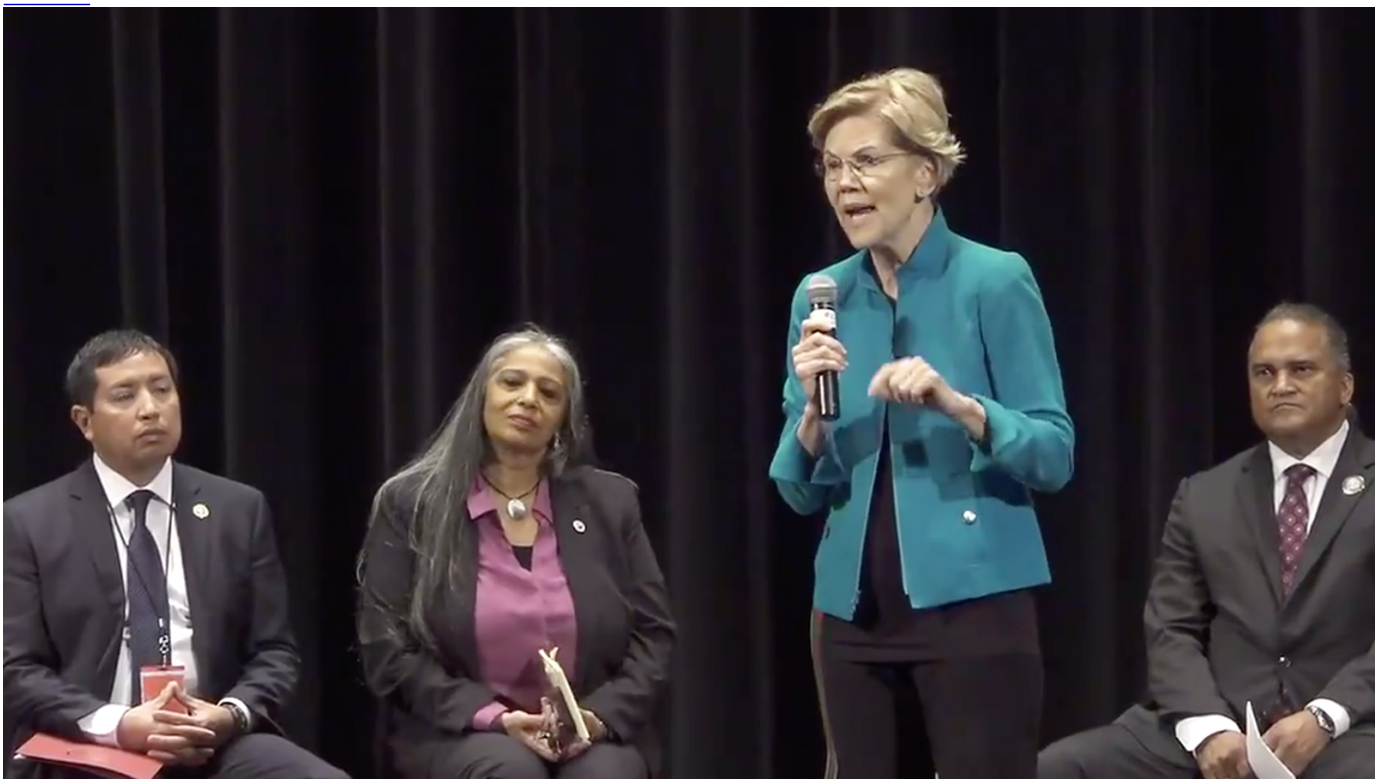
News



Sen. Elizabeth Warren participates in the Frank LaMere Native American Presidential Forum at the Orpheum Theater in Sioux City, Iowa, on Aug. 19, 2019. Video screengrab



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The largest presidential election forum focused on the concerns of Native Americans drew several leading Democratic presidential candidates in its first day, including Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

The Frank LaMere Native American Presidential Forum — named for the late Winnebago activist — is hosted by Native American voting rights group Four Directions and the Native Organizers Alliance.

A panel of tribal leaders, tribal citizens and Native American youth presented questions to each of the presidential candidates who appeared Aug. 19 at the two-day forum. A total of 11 candidates are expected to attend the forum at the Orpheum Theater in Sioux City, Iowa, either in person or via video.

O.J. Semans, co-executive director of Four Directions, introduced the forum as "Indian Country 101 for America," which included discussions of issues informed by indigenous spirituality.

Judith LeBlanc, director of the Native Organizers Alliance, referenced the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's action to stop construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota in her opening remarks. That action was sustained by a belief in the sacredness of the land and a spiritual responsibility to protect the water that ran through it.

"We are moving on a continuum from protest to power," LeBlanc said.

"Standing Rock interrupted the narrative, and when we left Standing Rock, we went back to our cities and our reservations to organize."

Warren's appearance at the forum was highly anticipated, in part because of controversy surrounding her claim to Cherokee ancestry.

Cherokee writer and activist Rebecca Nagle and other activists have taken issue with the claim.Meanwhile, President Trump has regularly mocked Warren by referring to her as "Pocahontas" — a remark many indigenous people also see as racist.

Warren appeared to address the controversy in her opening remarks.

"Like anyone who's been honest with themselves, I know that I have made mistakes," she said. "I am sorry for harm I have caused. I have listened and I have learned a lot, and I am grateful for the many conversations we have had together."

Warren was later pressed on pipelines that threaten sites indigenous people consider sacred.

"I will revoke the permit for the pipelines," she said to cheers and applause. "It shouldn't have been granted in the first place."

She also insisted on the importance of tribal sovereignty.

"Tribal governments are the ones who control what happens on tribal lands," she said. "That's what it means. A government-to-government relation.



Sen. Elizabeth Warren appeared at the Frank LaMere Native American Presidential Forum at the Orpheum Theater in Sioux City, Iowa, on Aug. 19, 2019. Video screengrab

The first question asked at the forum — to presidential candidate and spiritual author Marianne Williamson — referred to the Doctrine of Discovery, which gave theological justification to European conquest of Indigenous peoples and land.

Williamson addressed the panel "in the spirit of prayerfulness that was already invoked at this event."

Her remarks addressing the United States' history of unjust treatment of Native Americans also were couched in spiritual language, calling on the country to "atone" and "reconcile with a horrific chapter of our past."

When asked whether she would protect lands indigenous people deem sacred, the candidate insisted she "will not compromise" with corporations who unfairly encroach on such lands.

"Their time is over," she said

Presidential candidates Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., and Montana Gov. Steve Bullock are also slated to address the forum on Monday.

Sen. Bernie Sanders; former housing secretary Julián Castro; Navajo pastor, speaker and author Mark Charles; former Rep. John Delaney and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio are scheduled to speak Tuesday. Sen. Kamala Harris and former Rep. Joe Sestak reportedly are late additions to the line-up, according to Indian Country Today.

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