

# Voting: My Obligation to Past, Present, and Future

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It wasn't until 1954 that Native Americans in the state of Maine were allowed to vote in federal elections. As a full-blooded Native American (Cheyenne, Maliseet, and Penobscot) woman, I see voting as an obligation both to my

ancestors and to generations to come. I want to make a difference by exercising my right to vote and helping others do the same. In my neighborhood, I volunteer to help those that can't read that well so that they to have the opportunity to vote. I help shut-ins get their absentee ballots and campaign for my choices for Congress and governor. I also met our State House representative at the soup kitchen last fall.

My first voting experience resulted from a group effort of our ABE class to become active participants in the voting process. In class, we talked with some of the candidates. All of the students in the class voted except for one who is not a U.S. citizen yet. For some students, their votes were the first in the history of their families who may have lived for two or three generations here in Aroostook County. These students have broken the non-voting trend for themselves and their families.

I love to vote. I like the excitement, the rush of people entering and exiting booths, and friends coming and going. It is times like these that I look back and see how far our nation has come. Gender, nation of origin, and financial status no longer can be used to determine who can vote. For me, "to vote or not to vote" is not even in question. It is my obligation to the past, present, and future generations — and I do it proudly.

## From Your Point of View

List the ways that voting could be an obligation to the

### PAST:

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### PRESENT:

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### FUTURE:

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*Sheila was born in Bangor, ME. Her Native name is Sleeping Bear. She learned about her Native American heritage from her maternal grandparents, who taught her how to gather and prepare native herbs, spices and tree bark for treating a variety of ailments and how to predict weather patterns. Sheila currently resides in Caribou, ME, has two adult children and two grandchildren, is an active volunteer at the community soup kitchen, and serves as secretary of the social club.*