Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Debra Haaland of Laguna Pueblo attends Dems' convention

At the end of the Democratic National Convention July 28 in Philadelphia, Chelsea Clinton walked on stage and introduced her mother, Hillary, as "my mother, my hero, and the next president of the United States."

It was a moment of great historical significance, as the former first lady and secretary of state stepped up to speak to the crowd as the Democratic nominee for president – the first woman to lead a major party for the highest office in the land.

The seminal event was one that affected women all over the country, including one who holds political office around greater McKinley County. Laguna Pueblo's Debra Haaland, who was a super-delegate to the convention, can relate to being a "first."

Haaland, who graduated from the University of New Mexico as an undergraduate and from UNM's law school, is the chairwoman of the New Mexico Democratic Party. Haaland is the first Native American female to head a major state party in the history of New Mexico and the United States.

"I think all women everywhere can relate to what it's like being a first at something," Haaland said. "Women do go into it thinking different things: They think about the kids. They think about the home. But the important thing is that one has to do a good job no matter what the situation."

Haaland, who attended the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver as an at-large delegate when Barack Obama was the Democratic nominee, went to Philadelphia with Brian Lee of Gallup. Lee is the Gallup-based area representative for U.S. Rep. Ben Ray Lújan, D-N.M. Lee was a delegate at the Philadelphia convention. Haaland and Lee were part of an area delegation that included Navajo Nation Vice President Jonathan Nez.

Haaland and Sen. Martin Heinrich, D-N.M., called out the state votes for U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and Clinton. Both Haaland and Udall were super-delegates. New Mexico cast 16 votes for Sanders and 27 for Clinton.

Haaland is a single mother who has raised a successful daughter. She said she hopes both Clinton's and her own accomplishments show that women are not limited in what they can do in society. Haaland said she sees a country where women have a lot more opportunities than in the past, and Clinton's nomination represents progress.

"Sure, it's definitely progress," Haaland said. "And [Clinton] is a role model."

Haaland admires Clinton's toughness after dealing with unprecedented scrutiny as a woman in world politics.

"She is a woman of substance," Haaland said. "I think her getting the nomination shows that things are changing. I think it makes a big difference to see minorities and a woman in office because it shows there are no limitations."

Haaland was the running mate of Gary King in the 2014 gubernatorial effort to unseat Gov. Susana Martinez.

"It was exciting to hear [Clinton] speak about her time as Secretary of State and equally exciting to hear her talk about her contributions to health care," Lee said.

By Bernie Dotson
Sun Correspondent