

Community Development Influencers: People Who Make A Difference

By Brad Stanhope and Nick DeCicco, Novogradac, July 1, 2021



[Download PDF](#)

Influence in affordable housing and community development comes in various forms. There are organizational leaders, elected representatives, thought leaders and more. What they have in common is significant: the ability and drive to use affordable housing, community development, historic preservation and renewable energy tax incentives to better the lives and communities of others.

The Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits this month celebrates leaders in community development, historic preservation, affordable housing, and renewable energy, highlighting their achievements and influence.

“We recognize the influence and impact of these leaders for what they have done and continue to do in improving the lives and communities they serve, using the public-private partnership tools we cover in this magazine,” said Michael J. Novogradac, managing partner of Novogradac and publisher of the Journal of Tax Credits. “We celebrate and thank the influencers we highlight in this month’s issue for their work and leadership in greater opportunities for housing, jobs and more. We’re honoring the difference they make.”

Here is the Novogradac Journal of Tax Credits’ list of most influential people in affordable housing and community development in 2021:

General

Buzz Roberts

President/Chief Executive Officer, National Association of Affordable Housing Lenders

America can fulfill its promise only if every person in every neighborhood has a genuine chance to get ahead. Community development takes us a few steps forward every day, house by house, block by block.

–Buzz Roberts

Buzz Roberts has played a role in the development of so many community development incentives that it's hard to single one out. Roberts was a pioneer in the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC), new markets tax credit (NMTC), the HOME housing partnership program, the Capital Magnet Fund and plenty more.

As the head of the National Association of Affordable Housing Lenders (NAAHL), Roberts is an advocate for affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization. In recent years, his most prominent role has been as a leading voice in Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) regulatory reform. Roberts helped sound the alarm that regulations proposed and approved by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC) could actually decrease the incentive for banks to invest in affordable housing or community development. Roberts' advocacy—echoed by many in affordable housing and community development—led to the OCC withdrawing its final rule in May.

Before working with NAAHL, Roberts was the senior vice president for policy and program development at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, then was the director of the Office of Small Business, Community Development and Housing Policy at the U.S. Department of the Treasury under President Barack Obama.

While at LISC, Roberts was involved in 1986 negotiations that resulted in the LIHTC. Thirty-five years later, he continues to champion community development as a leading voice to retain the value of tax incentives in banks receiving credit for CRA investment. Affordable Housing

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington

We have an affordable housing crisis across the United States. Too many people are paying too much money to keep a roof over their heads and the COVID-19 pandemic has only made the crisis worse. The low-income housing tax credit is a proven, successful, bipartisan tool that builds nearly all new affordable housing nationwide. This bill will strengthen and expand our nation's most successful federal housing program to build more than 66,000 new affordable units around Washington state and more than 2 million nationwide over 10 years. We know this program works. Now is a critical time to invest in it to fight back against our affordable housing crisis and make sure we're not leaving families behind.

—Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington

Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana

Housing affordability is one of the most significant obstacles for many Americans. And over the past year, the pandemic has further highlighted the need for suitable housing with Americans across the country hunkered down in their homes for the collective good. Recently, I was proud to reintroduce my Yes in My Backyard Act to shed light on discriminatory land use policies, encourage localities to cut burdensome regulations and bring a new level of transparency to the community development process. Another key piece of legislation is the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act, which would strengthen the LIHTC to create more than 2 million new units of affordable housing

nationwide. The LIHTC continues to serve as a key tool to leverage private investment in affordable housing. I am focused on legislation that will fine-tune our existing housing and community development programs to ensure all Americans have access to safe and affordable homes.

–Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana

Bipartisan leadership in the 117th United States Congress is vital in the push to bolster and improve the LIHTC on the federal level.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, and Sen. Todd Young, R-Indiana, are lead sponsors of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act, a bill that would expand and enhance the federal LIHTC. It continues their work to help address America's affordable housing crisis.

Cantwell, a fourth-term Senator, was first elected in 2000. She served a stint in the House from 1993 to 1995 and as a member of the Washington statehouse from 1987 to 1993.

A longtime supporter of affordable housing legislation, Cantwell introduced similar legislation to bolster LIHTC in 2017 and 2019 and helped secure a 4% minimum credit rate in 2020 year-end legislation.

Despite being in his first term in the upper chamber, Young is the senior senator from Indiana. He also served three terms in the House, including serving on the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, representing the state's 9th District from 2011 to 2017.

Young was the keynote speaker earlier this year at Novogradac's 2021 Affordable Housing Virtual Conference.

Marcia Fudge

Secretary, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

It bears mentioning, particularly in this moment of crisis, that HUD—perhaps more than any other department—exists to serve the most vulnerable people in America. That mandate matters a great deal to me. It is consistent with my own values, and it is precisely what has always motivated me to service.

–Marcia Fudge

When Marcia Fudge was sworn in as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), it continued a career in assisting low-income families and seniors around the nation.

Fudge, the first Black woman to lead HUD since Patricia Harris in 1979, leads the federal department that oversees major federal housing programs, community planning and development, and myriad other programs, with an annual budget of more than \$60 billion and thousands of employees.

Fudge was raised in Cleveland and graduated from Ohio State University, then received her juris doctor degree from Cleveland State University. She comes to HUD after serving six-plus terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, representing the 11th Congressional District of Ohio. Before that, she was a two-term mayor of Warrensville Heights, Ohio, where she was very involved in housing issues. Before that, she was a member of the Cuyahoga County Prosecutors' Office.

Fudge has used her role at HUD to promote infrastructure spending and to boost morale as the nation emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Stockton Williams

Executive Director, National Council of State Housing Agencies

The most compassionate and creative—and some of the smartest and toughest—people in real estate are in affordable housing. Their ability to build, finance, and manage properties that are assets in more ways than one motivated me to start out in the business as a community-based developer more than 25 years ago and have inspired me ever since.

—Stockton Williams

As the executive director of the National Council of State Housing Agencies (NCSHA), Stockton Williams brings a wealth of experience.

It's a coming home for Williams, who began his professional career as a senior legislative and policy associate from 1995 to 2000 for NCSHA, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that coordinates and advocates for affordable housing.

Williams spent most of the 2000s working for Enterprise Community Partners as its senior vice president and chief strategy officer. After a stint as a senior adviser for Living Cities, a collective of movers and shakers geared toward closing racial gaps for low-income individuals, Williams spent time in the public sector under President Barack Obama's administration as a senior adviser for sustainable housing for HUD, as well as senior adviser for urban policy for the U.S. Department of Energy.

In the 2010s, Williams was a managing principal for three years for New York's HR&A Advisors, a real estate and economic development consulting firm, as well as serving in multiple roles for the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit group that provides leadership about the use of land, before returning in 2018 to NCSHA.

Williams has a master's degree in real estate development from Columbia University and a bachelor's degree from Princeton University.

Sunia Zaterman

Executive Director, Council of Large Public Housing Authorities

The promise of America is that opportunity is open to all. However, for the marginalized in our nation, that opportunity can be too distant and dim. A robust social safety net keeps America from breaking that promise. My life's work is grounded in a deep

commitment to the intrinsic value of all humans, and that housing is a basic human need. Public and affordable housing is a lifeline of hope that lifts families up and can make opportunity a reality. Preventing homelessness is a moral imperative by which the health of our nation should be measured.

–Sunia Zaterman

With more than 30 years working in affordable housing at all levels, Sunia Zaterman uses her role as the head of the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities (CLPHA) to influence the federal government and local leaders.

Zaterman has been a leader in calls for a long-term effort to recapitalize the public housing inventory and expand the housing voucher program. When President Joe Biden announced the America Jobs Plan in late March, Zaterman heralded the provisions to produce, preserve and retrofit more than 1 million housing units. She pointed out that public housing authorities are uniquely qualified to provide critical services to local communities, especially underserved communities of color.

Zaterman's role at CLPHA—which has 70 members who manage 40% of the nation's public housing program—is not new: She joined the organization in 1994. Before that, she was the director of research and development at the Alexandria, Virginia, Redevelopment and Housing Authority and was the executive director of the Travis County Housing Authority in Texas.

Jen Brewerton

Vice President of Compliance, Dominion

I am passionate about what I do because of the thousands of residents we get to serve because of the LIHTC tool, most of whom could not afford market-rate housing. Every day, thousands of kids get off of the school bus at our properties and they feel proud of where they are being dropped because our sites look no different from market-rate apartments in the area. Without the LIHTC, this would not be possible—it inspires me to advocate nationally for its continued use in new and even better ways. This affordable housing crisis that we are in also inspires me to keep up the fight for our current and future residents who badly need affordable housing.

– Jen Brewerton

When the average-income set-aside option was added to the LIHTC in 2018, it brought complexities for the affordable housing world. Jen Brewerton stepped in as a leading voice.

Brewerton, who oversees more than 35,000 units of affordable housing in 22 states for Dominion, one of the nation's leading affordable housing developers and management companies, stepped into a role as one of the key voices in the affordable housing world to push for clarity from the Internal Revenue Service by appearing as a speaker and authoring a series of articles to inform property managers. She was involved in communicating what should be in a Treasury revenue ruling on the set-aside and what results in a compliance violation.

Brewerton's leadership helped lead to more flexibility and her ability to clarify the messaging for the income-average set-aside allowed those in LIHTC property management to move past misinterpreting the provisions.

This is nothing new for Brewerton, who is tasked with determining and implementing affordable housing policy and procedures for Dominion. Before joining Dominion, Brewerton held a variety of positions, including 10 years with the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, where she oversaw the LIHTC, HOME, bond and HTF programs.

Matt Rayburn

Deputy Executive Director, Chief Real Estate Development Officer, Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority

I am passionate about the role that housing finance agencies play in providing housing opportunities, ending homelessness, serving vulnerable populations and strengthening communities. Every day, I am motivated by working with my incredible team and our extensive network of program partners. My favorite work involves designing programs and policies and building relationships with partner organizations to further our mission. Whatever I may be focused on that day—capital funding programs, rental assistance, compliance, disaster response, strategic planning, etc.—I know that the hard work we do as an HFA truly makes a difference.

— Matt Rayburn

Few—if any—state-level housing officials have had a higher profile in recent years than Matt Rayburn, who been a leading voice in implementing the average-income set-aside for low-income housing tax credit properties and in instituting the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) at a state level.

Rayburn, the deputy executive director and chief real estate development officer for the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), plays a central role in nearly everything his department does—but more than that, he has assumed a high-profile role as an expert on issues that affect people outside the Hoosier state. He routinely appears as a speaker on issues for compliance professionals.

Rayburn, who joined IHCDA in 2007, oversees the allocation and compliance for the Indiana's LIHTC, HOME Investment Partnerships Program, its portion of the national Housing Trust Fund, a state fund, housing choice vouchers and more—including ERA. He is also the disaster housing manager for the state. Rayburn works on agency-wide strategy, sets program policy, oversees the agency capital funding program and rental assistance programs and more. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he developed policies and response for the state. In addition, Rayburn is a member of myriad committees inside and outside Indiana.

Community Development
Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Missouri

The New Markets Tax Credit program is an effective tool for creating jobs, boosting economic growth, and enhancing the quality of life in underserved areas. The NMTC program has supported thousands of businesses and economic revitalization projects, from grocery stores and manufacturing facilities to affordable housing and social services. While I'm pleased the NMTC extension was included as part of the FY21 government funding bill, I'll continue urging my colleagues to support legislation I introduced with Senator Ben Cardin to permanently reauthorize this important program.

– Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Missouri

Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Alabama

As the lead sponsor of the New Markets Tax Credit Extension Act, I am fighting to expand this credit because it is so important to the economic development in underserved communities like those that exist in my Alabama district. I am a major proponent of incentivizing private investment to spur economic growth and the New Market Tax Credit does just that.

– Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Alabama

Rep. Terri Sewell and Sen. Roy Blunt have spearheaded a bipartisan, bicameral approach to the New Markets Tax Credit Extension Act in the House and the Senate, a bill that seeks to make the incentive permanent.

Blunt and Sewell, along with Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Maryland, and Rep. Tom Reed, R-New York, were instrumental in securing a five-year extension for the credit in December 2020.

Blunt, a Republican, previously served as Missouri's Secretary of State from 1985 to 1993. After a stint as the president of Southwest Baptist University, Blunt was elected to the first of seven terms in the House, representing Missouri's 7th District from 1997 through 2011.

Since 2011, Blunt moved to the Senate, now serving his second term. He announced earlier this year he does not plan to seek a third term in 2022.

Sewell, an Alabaman and Democrat in her sixth term, has represented the state's 7th District since 2011. A native of Selma, Alabama, and a graduate of Princeton University, Harvard Law School and Oxford University, before entering politics, she was the first Black woman to make partner at Maynard, Cooper & Gale, a law firm based in Birmingham, Alabama, as a public finance lawyer.

Among Sewell's efforts during her time on Capitol Hill is hosting an annual job fair as well as a job readiness workshop named Project R.E.A.D.Y., which stands for Realizing Everyone's Ability to Develop Yourself.

Jodie Harris
Director, CDFI Fund

Ensuring access and opportunity for all depends on a fair and equitable system. The CDFI Fund plays a critical role in our nation's financial ecosystem by providing capital to drive resources to underserved and undervalued communities across our country. Ensuring the CDFI Fund remains true to its mission and vision, and continues to be a vital partner to the CDFI network, is crucial to building that fair and equitable system.
– Jodie Harris

Jodie Harris plays the pivotal role in the New Markets Tax Credit program as the director of the U.S. Department of the Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund. Her role includes overseeing other CDFI Fund programs, as well.

Harris, a native of Philadelphia, has worked in the public and private sectors for more than 25 years. She started with Treasury in 2007, working as an associate program manager with the CDFI Fund, later becoming a senior adviser to the director. Also, in Treasury, she was the director of small business, community development and housing policy in its Office of Financial Institutions.

Prior to Treasury, Harris spent time with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, focusing on low-income food programs.

In the private sector, Harris began her career as a commercial real estate and community development credit analyst. Later, she was president of a nonprofit consulting firm that provided technical assistance and education to small businesses and entrepreneurs. She also spent time with Accenture LLC on financial institutions, nonprofits and tech companies in its strategy and business architecture division. Harris received multiple master's degrees from New York University and completed undergraduate work at the University of Maryland.

Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina

Already millions of Americans have seen and benefited from the incredible potential of opportunity zones across the nation. I am constantly amazed by all the impactful stories I've read about how entire communities are being revitalized and lifted out of poverty. These public-private partnerships are bringing in more than just new jobs and revenue—they're also restoring hope for people who have felt overlooked for far too long.

– Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina

Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey

We can unleash a wave of new investment into these communities in the form of startups, affordable housing and critical infrastructure. This is potentially a game-changer for our nation as a whole, for our economy and for the moral movement of making America more equitable and more successful together.

– Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey

The opportunity zones (OZ) incentive has resulted in billions of dollars of investment in low-income communities since 2018, but it might not have happened if it were not for two senators who sponsored legislation supporting it in 2017.

Sen. Tim Scott, R-South Carolina, and Sen. Cory Booker, D-New Jersey, in early 2016 co-sponsored the Investing in Opportunity Act, which they re-introduced in the next session of Congress and which included the provisions that were ultimately added to tax reform legislation at the end of 2017.

The original bill included the designation of OZs by governors, the ability to defer 10% and 15% of gain for holding the property for at least five and seven years and the exclusion of gain on qualified OZ property that is held at least 10 years. The legislation also included reporting framework that was not included in the final legislation.

In the years since, Scott and Booker have continued to advocate for the incentive—working not only to encourage investment, but also introducing legislation to require reporting on OZ investments as they included in their original bill.

Both senators have profiles that go well beyond OZs. Scott, who grew up in a poor, single-parent household in South Carolina, is in his second term and is on five Senate committees, including the tax-writing Senate Finance Committee. Booker, who grew up in New Jersey and played football at Stanford University, from where he graduated, was the mayor of Newark, New Jersey, before joining the Senate in 2013. He is also in his second full term (after winning a special election to complete the previous term) and serves on the Judiciary, Foreign Relations and the Environment and Public Works committees.

John Lettieri

President and CEO, Economic Innovation Group

Simply put, I believe there is vast untapped potential in communities throughout this country. But as a country, we have been too slow to respond to growing gaps in well-being between thriving and stagnant communities. Since launching in 2015, EIG has worked to equip policymakers to think in bigger and bolder terms about how place should factor into the economic agenda. It has been deeply rewarding to see the shift in the national debate on place-based policy in only a few short years, but there is much work left to do—especially in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis.

– John Lettieri

Along with his former EIG partner Steve Glickman and co-founder Sean Parker, Lettieri played a critical role in the creation of the OZ incentive and continues to be one of the leading advocates for the incentive. EIG is an independent, nonpartisan public policy organization that focuses on economic growth and Lettieri was a promoter of the idea of OZs well before it became law as part of the 2017 tax reform legislation.

Lettieri's interest in economic incentives for low-income areas came out of his experience. Lettieri served as a foreign policy aide to Sen. Chuck Hagel, then worked

as the director of public and government affairs for a global aerospace manufacturer, then was the vice president of public policy and government affairs for the Organization for International Investment, a global leading business organization.

EIG has played a key role in the development of the OZ incentive and Lettieri has been in the middle of much of it. His commentary and research has been cited in myriad leading publications. EIG has compiled data on uneven growth in a geographic sense and that data was crucial in promoting the OZ incentive.

Shay Hawkins

Chairman and CEO, The Opportunity Funds Association

I was born in Cleveland and I am named after a doctor who saved me and my mom's life when I was born. Half the city of Cleveland and almost every suburb had folks praying for our survival. Many of the same folks were praying for me again when I was paralyzed from the chest down in a severe car accident 34 years later. The people here helped my parents develop my mind, body and character in between. This community built me, twice, and I am thrilled to be a part of developing a policy to address our No. 1 challenge, which is poverty. The White House Council of Economic Advisors estimates that 1 million Americans will be lifted from poverty through opportunity zones. I love the thought of being a part of that.

– Shay Hawkins

Whether in his role as the lead policy advisor to Sen. Tim Scott during 2017 tax reform (when the OZ incentive became part of the tax code), heading up the Opportunity Funds Association or his other roles—working as an investment banker, field organizer in Ohio's Latinx community, as an adjunct instructor of economics at Cuyahoga Community College or as a candidate as a state representative—Shay Hawkins stays focused on economic development.

Hawkins was born and raised in Cleveland and graduated from Ohio State University before getting a master's degree from Columbia Business School and a juris doctor from the Moritz College of Law at Ohio State. He worked as an investment banker then as a field organizer for an organization that advanced the principals of entrepreneurship, free enterprise and personal responsibility in Ohio's Latinx community. Hawkins began his career on Capitol Hill working for Rep. Jim Renacci, R-Ohio, where he focused on tax reform.

While in Washington, Hawkins was the staff director for the subcommittee on Energy, Natural Resources and Infrastructure, then the senior tax and economic policy advisor for Scott. In that role, he was uniquely involved in shepherding the OZ incentive through the legislative process both with Congress and the White House, then worked with the Department of the Treasury to implement regulations for the new incentive.

With the Opportunity Funds Association, Hawkins works to enable qualified opportunity fund managers and investors to participate in public policy, share best practices and communicate the OZ incentive's benefits to distressed communities.

Historic Preservation

Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon

Historic rehabilitation projects across the country have been put on hold or shelved altogether as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be devastating to lose this history forever. As we look to build back better, an improved historic tax credit will be an important tool to create local jobs, increase private investment in our communities, and preserve thousands of buildings that celebrate and inform our heritage and sense of place.

– Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Oregon

Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-Louisiana

We've restored hundreds of historic buildings and revitalized communities in Louisiana thanks to the historic tax credit. It creates jobs and preserves our architectural heritage. Proud to support this mission.

– Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-Louisiana

In the push to preserve the federal historic tax credit (HTC), Rep. Earl Blumenauer and Sen. Bill Cassidy are two leading fighters on Capitol Hill.

The duo drives a bipartisan effort to push for the Historical Tax Credit Growth (HTC-GO) Act of 2021, which aims to strengthen the incentive while recognizing the challenges of development during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Blumenauer has served Oregon's 3rd district since 1996, when another member of the 2021 Novogradac Influencers List, Ron Wyden, moved from the House to the Senate. Blumenauer, a Democrat, has repeatedly fought for legislation regarding HTCs at the federal level and sponsored the HTC-GO bill in the House. Additionally, Blumenauer co-chairs the House's Historic Preservation Caucus.

Cassidy has represented Louisiana in the upper chamber since 2015. Prior to that, Cassidy, a Republican, served as a member of the House from 2009 to 2015, representing the Bayou State's 6th District.

Cassidy has consistently fought to strengthen and extend the HTC, including pushing for several drafts of the HTC GO Act in his chamber. When the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 wound its way through Congress, Cassidy was instrumental in the fight to preserve the credit after earlier versions of the bill would have ended it.

Merrill Hoopengardner

President, National Trust Community Investment Corporation

I have dedicated the past 15 years of my career to ensure disadvantaged communities around the country have the resources they need to save, revitalize and repurpose their historic treasures. The federal HTC is a model credit with over 40 years of track record that spurs economic activity, creates jobs, especially higher wage skilled trade positions and returns more money in taxes to the Treasury than the credit costs, and rehabs the

fabric of our country's tangible and cultural heritage, especially in economically distressed areas.

– Merrill Hoopengardner

Merrill Hoopengardner is steeped in tax credit knowledge, from her five years as the second president of the National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC) and chair of the Historic Tax Credit Coalition, to her experience in community development finance.

In the past 15 years, Hoopengardner structured and closed more than \$1 billion worth of projects with LIHTCs, NMTCs and HTCs.

In her role as the head of the NTCIC, Hoopengardner is in charge of fundraising and acquisitions, crafting and implementing the corporation's strategy and cultivating new business opportunities as well as coordinating relations between its governing board and staff.

Hoopengardner continues to push for strengthening the HTC, seeing the incentive as a productive, climate-friendly tool that can help with neighborhood revitalization. She expressed that the HTC-GO Act of 2021 can make "significant, positive changes," encouraging colleagues to reach out to elected officials to ensure the HTC GO Act is in upcoming infrastructure packages.

Before joining NTCIC, Hoopengardner was a principal at Advantage Capital Partners, a finance firm specializing in bringing together public and private entities to raise venture capital and small business capital for investments and loans in underserved areas. Hoopengardner raised more than \$100 million per year and state and federal NMTC funds for small businesses around the country.

Hoopengardner began her tax credit career with Nixon Peabody LLP, where she represented a number of community development entities (CDEs), investors and project sponsor clients. She sits on the advisory board for the SunTrust CDE as well as the Bank of America CDE. She's on the executive committee of the NMTC Coalition. Hoopengardner achieved her bachelor's and law degrees from Duke University.
Renewable Energy

Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon

As chair of the Senate Finance Committee, I'm committed to pursuing policies that create good-paying, clean energy jobs and tackle the climate crisis. ... I'm optimistic about getting creative, pragmatic legislation over the finish line because we know there's a huge hunger in this country for going big on infrastructure.

–Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Oregon

Throughout his career on Capitol Hill, Sen. Ron Wyden has fought for renewable energy legislation. Wyden once called climate change "the most important environmental challenge of our time."

Wyden, who served as chair of the Senate Finance Committee from February to December 2014 and returned to the post earlier this year, introduced the Clean Energy for America Act, which would streamline the tax code to make funding flow more easily, combining more than 40 credits into three categories.

A senator since 1996, Wyden previously was a seven-term representative for Oregon's 3rd District in the House from 1981 to 1996, when he was succeeded by another member of Novogradac's 2021 Influencers List, Rep. Earl Blumenauer.

Wyden has been an advocate for environmental issues during his time in the Senate, including supporting President Barack Obama's administration's Clean Power Plan in 2015 and casting doubt on President Donald Trump's administration's efforts to repeal it.

Wyden has also been a leader in affordable housing, including pushing in 2020 to create the minimum floor for 4% LIHTC.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa

Throughout my tenure in the Senate, I have been a leader in promoting renewable energy sources. This leads to a cleaner environment and increases America's energy independence.

– Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa

Sen. Chuck Grassley, a Republican from Iowa, has long championed renewable energy incentives, calling himself "the father of wind energy" thanks to the 1993 Wind Energy Incentives Act. A year earlier, he was vital to the Energy Policy Act, which helped create the federal wind energy tax credit.

More recently, the senator called wind power "a significant contributor to an all-of-the-above energy strategy that will help America meet its modern energy needs," estimating wind power has created as many as 10,000 jobs in his state and generates 40 percent of its electricity.

He also helped develop the Renewable Fuel Standard in the Energy Policy Act of 2005. In 2019, Grassley notched an extension of the Biodiesel Tax Credit through 2022.

Grassley is a long-time politician with eight terms in the Iowa statehouse from 1959 to 1975 and three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1975 to 1981 before moving across the rotunda to the Senate, where he's now in his seventh term. From 2019 until earlier this year, Grassley was president pro tempore of the Senate. He's also chaired the Senate Finance Committee, the Senate Narcotics Committee, the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Aging Committee.

Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota

If we want to keep American energy affordable and abundant, we need to make sure we stay on the cutting edge of energy innovation and continue to invest in our domestic energy supply—from oil and natural gas to renewable energy sources like hydropower and wind.

—Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota

Sen. John Thune, a Republican from South Dakota and a senior member of the Senate Finance Committee, has prioritized clean energy in his platform.

Currently the Senate minority whip and previously the upper chamber's majority whip from 2019 until earlier this year, Thune was a keynote speaker at Novogradac's 2019 Renewable Energy Tax Credit conference.

With 16 ethanol plants in South Dakota, Thune keeps biodiesel at the top of his agenda. Earlier this year, Thune supported Adopt the Greenhouse Gases, Regulated Emissions and Energy Use in Transportation Model Act aimed at updating Environmental Protection Agency regulations around greenhouse gas modeling for ethanol and biodiesel. In 2019, Thune notched a five-year extension of the Biodiesel Blender's Tax Credit.

In 2020, Thune pushed for the American Energy Innovation Act, arguing on the Senate floor about the benefits of clean energy technologies, including wind, solar, hydropower and geothermal.

Thune represented his state in the U.S. House of Representatives in three terms from 1997 to 2003. From there, he switched to the Senate, where he's in his third term. Before seeking office, he worked within the South Dakota GOP in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Abigail Ross Hopper

President and CEO, Solar Energy Industries Association

The solar investment tax credit (ITC) is responsible for more than 200,000 solar careers, thousands of new businesses, billions of dollars of private investment, and emissions reductions across the country. As Congress considers ways to jumpstart our economy and invest in clean energy infrastructure, the ITC remains a top driver of solar deployment today. . . . Solar businesses need certainty and a stable policy environment to speed deployment and continue to grow their businesses. A 10-year extension of the ITC and direct pay provision could add much needed certainty and help create the market conditions needed for businesses to deploy solar and meaningfully address the climate crisis.

— Abigail Ross Hopper

Abigail Ross Hopper fights for the future of solar power in her role at the top of Solar Energy Industries Association (SEIA), a solar power advocacy group.

The president and chief executive officer of SEIA started there in January 2017. During President Donald Trump's administration, Hopper worked on solar panel policy regarding tariffs and tax reforms.

Hopper's renewable energy credentials extend back more than a decade. In various roles for the state of Maryland, she served as for two years deputy general counsel with Maryland Public Service Commission and later director of the Maryland Energy Administration (MEA) in the early 2010s before rising to become energy adviser to the state's governor, Martin O'Malley. While leading the MEA, Hopper fought for the Maryland Offshore Wind Energy Act of 2013.

Hopper later escalated to the federal level, becoming in January 2015 the second director of the U.S. Department of Interior's Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, leading the agency that oversees the leasing and development of all offshore energy from oil to natural gas to offshore wind.

Before her public sector work, from 2003 to 2008, Hopper worked with a Washington law firm specializing in divorce and custody battles. She was in private practice for nine years.

Hopper earned her bachelor's degree from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, and her law degree from the University of Maryland School of Law, later renamed the University of the Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

Heather Zichal CEO, American Clean Power Association

Tax credits have always been a spark to ignite innovation, but for clean energy they've also been the catalyst to cut costs for customers, while growing record numbers of projects and the jobs that come along with them. Now they are even more important than ever to bring clean energy to scale everywhere at the rapid pace we need to address climate change. They're a pro-growth, pro-business accelerator and that's why they have bipartisan backing.

– Heather Zichal

Experience in the private and public sectors gives Heather Zichal an edge. In December, Zichal became the CEO of the American Clean Power Association, a newly formed trade organization focusing on companies that develop wind and solar energy as well as energy storage and transmission. The organization joined forces last year with the American Wind Energy Association.

She's worked to bridge the needs of the public and private sectors on clean power, navigating both spheres to advocate for renewable energy and the economic incentives that can help drive it. Zichal's position as a leader for renewable energy came after she advised then-candidate Joe Biden on his clean energy plan, an alternative to the Green New Deal legislation first proposed in Congress in 2019.

She's a familiar face to the Biden administration. When Biden was vice president, Zichal was vital in crafting the Clean Power Plan under President Barack Obama as his deputy assistant on energy and climate change. Before her work with Obama, Zichal was a legislative director for then-Sen. John Kerry, working on his energy and environmental policies during his 2004 campaign. Zichal additionally worked as legislative director for Rep. Frank Pallone and Rep. Rush Holt, who both represented New Jersey in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In the private sector, before her current role, she worked as a private consultant and a fellow for the Atlantic Council.

She's served on the board of several companies, including Cheniere Energy, and was the vice president for corporate engagement for The Nature Conservancy. She was the executive director of the Blue Prosperity Coalition, which brings together governments around the world, nonprofit organizations, scientists and ocean experts to pursue sustainable economic and energy goals.