

NEW MEXICO FIRST
NEW MEXICO TOWN HALLS

*AMERICAN INDIANS IN NEW MEXICO AND THEIR NEIGHBORS:
BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING*

June 4-7, 1998

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PERCEPTIONS AND BELIEFS

The Town Hall acknowledges that many American Indians and non-Indians hold certain negative stereotypes and generalizations about each other--many of them perpetuated by institutions, including the media--which interfere with the establishment of better relationships. American Indians pay taxes and contribute significantly to the economy of New Mexico, particularly in communities near the pueblos and reservations, through commerce and trade, which includes professional services, tourism, arts and crafts, economic development including gaming, and natural resources.

The Town hall strongly urges American Indians and non-Indians alike to become more educated about American Indian people and tribal governments in order to become more sensitive to their interests and concerns and how they affect all New Mexicans.

FINANCING AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Healthcare, education, housing, economic development, business regulations and taxation all affect the quality of life on American Indian reservations and in surrounding communities. The Town Hall recognizes a clear need for improved collaboration and coordination among state and tribal governments to improve delivery of services.

- **Financing -** *The Town Hall recognizes* a need for state and tribal governments to acknowledge each others' agreements within the legislative, executive, and judicial branches could do much to establish formal government relations among American Indian tribes and pueblos and state and local governments.

The Town Hall consensus is that dual taxation—tribal and state taxation of identical activities on tribal lands—is inappropriate because it can infringe on tribal sovereignty and can hurt both tribes and the state by discouraging business development on pueblos and reservations.

The Town Hall recommends that the state and tribes work on a government-to-government basis to propose legislation to eliminate the negative consequences of the total tax structure on American Indian governments, communities, and New Mexico businesses.

The Town Hall recommends that state personnel and contracting codes be amended to increase American Indian employment and contracting opportunities on state projects involving Indian country.

- **Healthcare -** Healthcare funding and delivery are evolving nationwide in the direction of a managed care system, which affects healthcare choices and negatively impacts health services to American Indians and New Mexicans.

The Town Hall recommends that the Public Regulation Commission and the Legislature establish a task force representative of all tribal entities and urban Indians to implement a formal consultation process to adopt, regulate, and implement state/federal mechanisms to improve healthcare service delivery to American Indian people, including long-term care services for those with disabilities.

- **Education -** American Indians and their neighbors alike have concerns about acquiring quality education for their children. The quality of that education should be consistent regardless of the child's community or the location of his or her school, with particular emphasis on improving American Indian student achievement. Student competency and understanding of cultural diversity shall be required as part of the State Board of Education Content Standards and local educational plans for student success.

In addition, the New Mexico Board of Education should be encouraged to adopt an approved curriculum prepared by Indian educators that promotes Indian history, culture, values, and perspectives as part of our overall educational process.

Indians and non-Indians concerned about the quality of education for all American Indian students will form a statewide coalition to address the numerous issues raised at this Town Hall and to develop an implementation plan. It is further recommended that the State Board of Education and Department of Education be responsible for facilitating this process.

The Town Hall recommends that teacher compensation, training and recruiting all be consistent and improved for all New Mexico schools including a requirement of educating teachers in diversity and American Indian culture and history. The tribes, private sector, and legislators will be called upon to appropriate new revenues to education, including transportation and capital improvements.

The Town Hall recommends that tribal, educational and all leaders examine state funding for public schools and the factors taken into consideration to equalize that funding for all schools serving American Indian students.

A VISION OF NEW MEXICO

The Town Hall expressed its vision of New Mexico clearly and eloquently: That People of all cultures treat each other with respect and understanding; multiculturalism is celebrated for the differences it displays and for the strength it provides; American Indian communities continue to govern themselves without threat from their neighbors; disadvantaged communities are provided the educational and technological tools to improve their economic wealth, and opportunities for economic prosperity are shared; religions and spiritual beliefs are mutually recognized and respected; quality healthcare and housing are universally available; the environment is protected for the common good; the earth, air, water, wildlife, and other natural resources are utilized responsibly and respectfully; and sacred lands are preserved; American Indians and non-Indians reach out and communicate in a spirit of cooperation to prevent and resolve disagreements.

BUILDING BRIDGES

The Town Hall strongly recommends that the governor issue an executive order and the State Legislature memorialize that the state adopt a policy similar to ¹EO 13083 and 13084 directing consultation and coordination with Indian tribal governments. The state must assure that this policy is implemented at all levels of government.

The Town Hall recommends the continued pursuit of options and processes to develop an integrated health-care delivery system for American Indians that will not abrogate the federal trust responsibility.

¹ Federal Executive Order referring to the issue of federalism and the unique legal relationship of tribal governments with the federal government and the order to executive agencies to consult and coordinate with tribal governments on all issues directly affecting them

The Town Hall believes that an assistant secretary position in IHS should be created and staffed, that our congressional delegation sponsor this initiative with appropriate legislation. New Mexico tribes should spearhead and follow through to support this legislation.

The Town Hall recommends that cultural sensitivity training be required of all new and existing state and local government employees, in order to foster understanding of American Indian issues among the government work force. Additionally, all newly elected officials should be encouraged to attend special training on American Indian issues of tribal sovereignty and intergovernmental relations.

The Town Hall also recommends that state, local, and tribal governments develop legislation to require cultural diversity and representation on state boards, commissions, legislative, and executive branch advisory committees and task forces.

The Town Hall also adopts a recommendation that American Indian tribes be invited and encouraged to participate in statewide and regional land use, transportation and water planning programs.

The Town Hall recommends that courses in New Mexico's cultural diversity be required for teacher certification. All education licensure, new and renewal, must include multicultural competency.

The State Board of Education shall ensure that state-adopted instructional materials thoroughly cover American Indian history, sovereignty, and intergovernmental relations.

The New Mexico First Town Hall recommends that existing state and local agencies be responsive to all American Indian religions and sacred sites for preservation.

The Town Hall recommends that the Office of American Indians Affairs be empowered to take on additional duties aimed at improving the framework and developing protocols for better government-to-government relationships.

The Town Hall recommended that New Mexico's executive and legislative branches work on a government-to-government basis with tribal governments to conduct factual studies and then to recommend mutually acceptable solutions to:

- dual taxation on American Indian reservations
- sharing of revenue derived from activities including but not limited to gross receipts taxes, tourism, severance taxes, and law-enforcement revenue
- support pending legislation and ²Title 8 PL 874 (impact aid) funding; that provides for direct support and augmentation of American Indian education
- the addition of pre-schools for all pre-kindergarten students below the poverty level to be funded by the Legislature
- address the problem of American Indian student school attendance
- encourage representation of American Indians on rural and urban school boards.

The Town Hall recommends that state, local, and tribal governments cooperatively undertake a campaign presenting examples of positive contributions of American Indians to help foster better relations with non-Indian people in New Mexico. Furthermore the Town Hall recommends effective use of media to reach the general public and create a positive self-image for young American Indian people.

American Indian communities should undertake to help foster better relations with non-Indian people in New Mexico. More effective use of the media, including mainstream newspapers, radio talk shows, as well as electronic media on the Internet.

The Town Hall suggests more innovative ways of reaching out including establishing an in-state sister city program between American Indian and non-Indian communities and creating a "United Nations" concept in New Mexico.

The Town Hall urges greater interaction between American Indians and their neighbors on a personal level, which will result in less mistrust and greater understanding and will lead to better overall relations.

The Town Hall recognizes and supports the process and protocols identified in the July 1996 State/Tribal Memorandum of Agreement to work cooperatively on a government-to-government basis.

The Town Hall recommends that tribes consider enhancing economic development through adoption of business and commercial codes, ensuring that tribal courts have fair and understandable procedures, and that they explore opportunities to partner with business and other governments.

The Town Hall recommends that the New Mexico Congressional Delegation secure funding for tribal courts as authorized but not yet appropriated under the Tribal Justice Act.

The entities that are responsible for these bridge-building efforts includes every person, every business, every school, every media organization, every governmental agency, every tribe, every pueblo and every religious leader. That is because building truly productive and positive relationships takes everyone's work over a long period of time.

For a complete Town Hall Report or a presentation by the Town Hall Implementation Team call the New Mexico First office at 505-242-3205 or in-state toll free 888-663-0001.

² At this time the State of New Mexico takes 95% of the Title VIII PL-874 (Impact Aid) funds from the Native American student living on tribal lands. They equalize this funding among all school districts. The Title VIII PL-874 was intended to be used to offset the lack of property tax.