Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Editor,

In Jan. 2019, "Indigenous Peoples Day" was declared an official New Mexico state holiday. In 2019, it was truly historic in the fact that (former) Mayor Jackie McKinney and Navajo Nation Council delegate Edmund Yazzie both took time to acknowledge the place we have in this world-wide movement at our Celebration Site in Gallup. With 574 federally recognized "American Indian and Alaska Native tribes and villages in the U.S." it is a fitting role for Gallup, the "Indian Capital of the World."

On Sept. 27, 2016, the City of Gallup passed Resolution/Proclamation R2016–40, declaring the second Monday of October as "Indigenous Peoples' Day" into perpetuity. Accordingly, the McKinley County Commission also approved Resolution/Proclamation No. OCT 17–085 on Oct. 17, 2017 designating the second Monday in October of each year as "Indigenous Peoples' Day."

Mayor McKinney (at the time) stated that the Resolution/Proclamation R2016–40 would have a place in City Hall on display. That never happened. Mayor Louie Bonaguidi now has the opportunity to officially celebrate the state holiday and prepare for November, "Native American Heritage Month" in full public display. The Year 1992, Congress, by Public Law 102-188, was designated as the "Year of the American Indian." But to me, every day is Indigenous Peoples' Day.

This year, the restrictions of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic put a stop to the annual event, so I did something different. I accepted an invitation to assist in the development and construction of a Lakota "Moon Lodge" and Inipi on the undisclosed property of a Safe House for Women with Children who need to escape the dangerous settings of domestic violence. Twelve years under the guidance of two Sundance Chiefs gave me the opportunity as well.

An honor indeed, but not without first dedicating the work to my mother, who raised me to never give up, always take a stand for our Diné (Navajo) people, do the right thing and help in every way I can with whatever I have. Be sure to thank her for the life-long lessons she taught me as they connect to the years of celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Day, the first five of which I stood alone. Now it is a state holiday thanks to the citizens of Gallup, McKinley County, and New Mexico.

The next objective is to make this a federal holiday and the Great Navajo Nation is invited to join this effort and make it a reality. That is what "sovereignty" is about, the recognition of our Nation and perhaps one day, if it is the will of the Navajo People, a state within the United States of America. We already exist with a government-to-government relationship with Uncle Sam and statehood would add representation in Congress and make more federal dollars available.

The leadership who takes us to that juncture must understand that this work is the foundation for the next Seven Generations to come. That is Indigenous history in the making. Our Story. That is our right as the First Nations of the United States of America. We will not rest until we are at the forefront of this global Celebration of "Indigenous Peoples' Day"...

Mervyn Tilden
Gallup, New Mexico