

Letter to the Editor

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 28 June 2019 06:59

Editor,

The Indigenous Peoples Commission, established on March 13, 2018 by the Gallup City Council under Ordinance # C2018-5, met for a work session on June 12, 2019 to approve Public Comments for the Healing Forum Report that was developed for the Gallup community, a "Community Perception Survey" and other items that impact the native population locally and regionally.

The City Ordinance reads: "The membership shall consist of not more than five voting members and one ex-officio, non-voting member appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council. The ex-officio member shall be a city employee or official. Voting members shall be residents of New Mexico with three being residents of McKinley County, and two being residents of Gallup."

One of the things that has been discussed in several meetings in the past is the noticeable absence of the Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney and the four City Councilors (Linda Garcia (District 1); Allan Landavazo (D2); Yogash Kumar (D3); and, Fran Palochak (D4). As the delegated appointees of the City Council for the representation of natives (mostly Navajos), the IPC also discussed the importance of the participation [of] the Navajo Nation, namely someone from the Office of the President and Vice-President and the Navajo Nation Council.

As a part of McKinley County, the County Commission and the New Mexico State representatives are also an important aspect of bringing the issues to the forefront for discussion and consideration at every level of government that could draw in the issues of Native ("Indigenous") Americans, since there are currently 573 federally recognized tribes in the United States of America.

The purpose of the IPC is also to "serve as an advisory board to the Gallup City Council concerning matters of cultural diversity, fairness, equal opportunity, and respect for indigenous peoples and cultures." Debra Martinez, City of Gallup Behavioral Health Program Manager, and Nicole Lujan, PARD Coordinator is also a City employee participant.

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The issues that surround the IPC are numerous and one of the discussions involves the possibility of the City supporting another "Indian Community Center". In many other major cities (Albuquerque, Phoenix, Denver, San Francisco, etc.) there are Indian Centers that provide a connection to the Indigenous population for the purposes of maintaining contact with their families, job search, health concerns, showers, clean clothing and to just hang out with each other and fellowship. The former "Gallup Indian Community Center did all of the aforementioned. My first job as a teen was as a "Peer Counselor" at the Center.

Five Navajo communities surround Gallup and active outreach by the IPC to the regional native population and governmental officials has not yet been coordinated, but everyone who is interested in attending is invited to attend. With that in mind, consider this your invitation to the next meeting. The Indigenous Peoples Commission meetings are held at least quarterly with the next meeting scheduled for June 27 beginning at 6:00 pm at the Gallup City Council Chambers. The public is invited to attend.

Mervyn Tilden
Gallup, New Mexico