

Trump counter-message gains popularity

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Vanessa Bowen wants to highlight Native pride, 'hózhó'

Former Gallup resident Vanessa Bowen did what she felt was necessary to counter what she said was a hateful political message put out by Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump.

A few months ago, Native-born Bowen began creating hats bearing the words "Make America Native Again." The words are a take on Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," but they're also inspired by Native American history and values.

"I was terrified of what our country would become if Trump was to be elected president," Bowen, a Gallup native and former marketing and event coordinator at the city's Business Improvement District, said.

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She said Trump's racist and anti-immigrant remarks inspired the hat's creation.

"The hat's meaning is more focused on the Indigenous values that Native people share: matriarchy, sustainability, strong community, the Seventh Generation Principle (how decisions impact descendants) and the Navajo belief of living in hózhó (beauty, order, harmony and balance in Navajo culture)."

Bowen said these values, which are "quite the opposite of [Donald Trump's] rhetoric," should be upheld by the country as a whole.

Trump has publicly called Mexicans "rapists." He's also accused them of bringing illegal drugs over the border and into the United States.

He's called women "bimbos," and referred to Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Massachusetts, who is part Native American, as "Pocahontas."

"I am Diné – a proud member of the Navajo Nation," Bowen said. "I am not a racist."

Bowen studied at Fort Lewis College, in Durango, Colo., and now lives and works in Albuquerque as a web and graphic designer.

A self-proclaimed political activist, Bowen said, "I advocate for marginalized people with a focus on Indigenous rights. They say dissent is patriotic, so educating and protesting are my ways of being patriotic."

As far as Bowen's political identity goes, "I am a Democratic Socialist due to my political stance. It truly is in direct opposition to the current Republican's ideals," she said.

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Over the past few months, her hat has been featured on CNN, ABC News, and KOAT Action 7 News of Albuquerque, as well as in national publications like *Black Enterprise*.

The hat costs \$30, with Limited-edition hats selling for \$40. To date, Bowen said she's sold more than 500 'Make America Native Again' hats to folks as far away as Australia.

Bowen also has jackets and sweaters on back-order due to popularity.

Soon, she plans to sell the hats, and other paraphernalia, at the Downtown Conference Center on Coal Avenue in Gallup.

"I think it's something that has a very interesting concept to it," Knifewing Segura, CEO of the DCC at 204 W. Coal Ave., said. "I plan to sell them here."

Meanwhile, Trump and Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton and Libertarian candidate Gary Johnson, a former New Mexico governor, are set to square off in the first of four televised debates on Sept. 26 at Hofstra University on Long Island, N.Y. The general election is Nov. 8.

Bowen said she's received all kinds of feedback on the "Make America Native Again" message, including the negative. She said she receives stereotypical remarks about Native Americans, some of which suggest that oppressed people should just get over their traumatic history. The positive feedback, though, congratulates Bowen on turning Trump's message against itself.

"I don't like the message that [Trump] preaches, and I find him to be a bigot," Bowen said. "Trump's racist, misogynistic, and hateful rhetoric was the catalyst to create the [Make America Native Again] hat."

To purchase Bowen's merchandise, visit bowencreative.co/shop.

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