

Letter to the Editor: Every day is Indigenous Peoples' Day

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 07 December 2018 09:02

Editor,

This coming January 2019, the New Mexico State Legislature has an opportunity to make history and vote on proposed legislation to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples' Day.

State Representative Derrick Lente, a member of Sandia Pueblo tribe, stated it has cleared its first hurdle with an unopposed committee endorsement.

After the inauguration of Democratic Governor — elect Michelle Lujan Grisham — the bill will be introduced, although it is not yet clear if she supports the proposal to rename the state holiday on the second Monday in October.

New Mexico remains strongly attached to its colonial history, but less so to the sailor who was lost at sea and facing a mutiny; the sighting of land saved him from the plank.

The state's history dates back to the late 16th century when the Spanish explorers sought to colonize the land and killed an estimated 1,000 Acoma natives who were defending their winter food supplies. All men and women older than 12 were enslaved for 20 years and men older than 25 (24 individuals) had one foot amputated.

For the past 14 years in Gallup, I have been organizing this particular event here and I have joined other nations and organizations across America during my travels since 1992, when Congress, by Public Law 102-188, designated it as the "Year of the American Indian." But to me, every day is Indigenous Peoples' Day.

"Indigenous Peoples Day" first began in July 1990, when representatives from 120 Indian nations from every part of the Americas met in Quito, Ecuador in the First Continental Conference (Encuentro) along with many human rights, peace, social justice and environmental organizations to recognize 500 Years of native Resistance against the continued colonization of

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our original homelands.

It was also in preparation for the 500th anniversary of Native resistance to the European invasion of the Americas from 1492 to 1992. The Encuentro saw itself as fulfilling a prophecy that the Native nations would rise again “when the eagle of the north joined with the condor of the south.”

Here in Gallup, it is very fitting that “Indigenous Peoples' Day” be recognized even as much as the City touts itself as the “Indian Capital of the World.”

The many contributions that Navajo individuals made can be seen everywhere from the exquisite art work and murals to the land base that once was Navajo territory before the founding of the City as the Gateway to the “Wild West.”

Gallup also has an Indigenous Peoples' Commission as an Advisory Board (City Ordinance #C2018-5); these and other initiatives on behalf of the native population in the city are well-deserving of official support.

The Navajo Nation must add its voice in support, not only now, but after the January inaugurations.

With more that can be added, suffice it to mention that the City of Gallup has passed a 2017 Resolution R2016-40, declaring the Second Monday of October as “Indigenous Peoples' Day” into perpetuity; McKinley County also approved Resolution/Proclamation No. OCT-17-085 Designating the Second Monday in October of each year as Indigenous Peoples Day.

Mervyn Tilden

Gallup, New Mexico

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