

THE UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

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CONTACT: TERRI A. DICKERSON, PUBLIC AFFAIRS

U.S. COMMISSION ON CIVIL RIGHTS

624 9th St. NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20425

202/376-7700

NEW REPORT DOCUMENTS IMPROVED RACE RELATIONS IN NEW MEXICO

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION'S STATE COMMITTEE CREDITS LOCAL LEADERSHIP FOR PROMOTING CHANGE

FARMINGTON, NM - A report to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights from its New Mexico Advisory Committee concludes that race relations between Native American and white communities, in Farmington, and surrounding areas, have progressed significantly over the last three decades. *The Farmington Report: Civil Rights for Native Americans 30 Years Later* credits local leaders for “promoting positive relationships with Native Americans and the Navajo Nation,” and singles out Farmington mayor Bill Standley’s influence. The report also acknowledges the role that San Juan College has played in improving the atmosphere in a region consequential because of its location near a Navajo reservation border. The committee first held hearings in Farmington in 1974 following the mutilation murders of three Navajo men. A year later, the committee released *The Farmington Report: A Conflict of Cultures*, which found that local officials had failed to assume active leadership for community relations.

The new report, approved for publication by the Commission at its November 18 meeting, is based on evidence offered at a major public forum convened in Farmington by the New Mexico committee in April 2004. More than 60 people, including elected state, local, and tribal officials, educators, business and civic leaders, law enforcement officers, attorneys, and community members testified. Commission staff conducted additional research.

The committee’s report documents progress and also points to residual problems in the region, among them:

1. Native Americans are not represented on the Farmington City Council, despite their growing numbers in the community;
2. Police-community relations continue to be a source of concern for Native Americans; their arrest rates remain disproportionately high;
3. Health care issues require greater attention to address serious problems including diabetes, alcoholism, and mental health disorders;
4. Consumer discrimination, including predatory lending practices, payday loans, usurious interest rates, and other deceptive sales practices are still prevalent;
5. The Central Consolidated School District, serving mostly Navajo students in the Shiprock area, is experiencing turmoil and adversarial relations between key Navajo leaders and school district

624 9th Street, N.W. • Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20425

Ph: (202) 376-7700 • Fx: (202) 376-7672

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representatives. The academic performance of Native Americans in this district is well below that of white students.

In the report, the committee recommends that public and private institutions throughout the region hire more Native Americans in policy-making, administrative, and other significant positions. It challenges the city of Farmington to establish an official human relations commission, and calls on Native Americans to more fully participate in the electoral process. The committee urges New Mexico's governor and legislature to consider reforms that will mitigate predatory lending practices.

In its conclusions, the advisory committee acknowledges continuing problems and also expresses optimism for the future:

There is evident a new cadre of leaders that intend to move Farmington ahead as a vital center of commerce, education, culture, and tourism. These leaders acknowledge that Farmington is a "suburb" of the Navajo Nation. They embrace, rather than resist, their culturally rich and diverse heritage, recognizing this as an asset rather than a liability. This is the most significant difference observed by the Committee in our thirty years of involvement with the community.

Thirty Years Later can be accessed at the Commission's Web site: www.usccr.gov. Copies also may be obtained by contacting the Commission's Rocky Mountain Regional Office, 1700 Broadway, Suite 710, Denver, CO 80290; (303) 866-1040, fax (303) 866-1050.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights is an independent, bi-partisan, fact-finding agency of the federal government. Its members are appointed by the President and the Congress. The Commission has appointed advisory committees in the 50 states and the District of Columbia to assist it in its efforts.

The New Mexico Advisory Committee members are: Valerie Webb Jaramillo and Hilary A. Noskin of Albuquerque; Lynda B. Eaton of Bloomfield; Pamela Denise Evans of Hobbs; Emma Armendariz, Darol Kent Evans, James A. Nez, and Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces; Patrick Denis Collins of Roswell; and John I. Binkley, Rebecca Bustamante, Dale B. Carmichael, and Cindy J. Lovato-Farmer of Santa Fe. Stanley Agustin of Albuquerque serves as chairman.

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights members are: Chairman Gerald A. Reynolds, Vice Chairman Abigail Thernstrom, and Commissioners Jennifer C. Braceras, Peter N. Kirsanow, Arlan Melendez, Ashley L. Taylor, and Michael Yaki. Kenneth L. Marcus is Staff Director. John F. Dulles is the Regional Director, Denver.

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