



NAVAJO NATION HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NNHRC conducts Public Hearings on Race Relations in Torreon and Albuquerque

St. Michaels, Ariz. – From the remotely quaint region of Torreon, N.M. to the urban streets of Albuquerque, N.M., the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission (NNHRC) provided local communities an opportunity to voice concerns of racial discrimination at two public hearings held Friday and Saturday at the Torreon Chapter House and Albuquerque Indian Center.

Commissioners Duane H. Yazzie, Clarence Chee, Steve Darden, Dr. Rena Yazzie and Irving Gleason were present to hear individuals testify on discrimination issues pertaining to health care, retail services and education, among other issues.

City of Albuquerque Mayor Martin J. Chavez attended the Albuquerque hearing and told the Commission of his administrations efforts in working with surrounding sovereign nations on issues relating to transportation, education and health care.

“I encourage the Navajo Nation and this Commission to speak with one voice to Congress and the new president to have funding



City of Albuquerque Mayor Martin J. Chavez addresses the NNHRC Commissioners Saturday morning.

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restored for health care,” Mayor Chavez said.

Albuquerque Human Rights Office Investigations Officer Juanita Martinez says discrimination has a different face from the 60’s and 70’s era.

“People who choose to unlawfully discriminate usually do it with a hand shake and a smile and people don’t know what just hit them,” Martinez said.

Martinez gave examples from a study done by the Urban Institute involving ethnic participants to pose as potential renters at a high-end apartment complex. Despite both African American and Anglo potential renters having rated their service as excellent, the results showed clear preferential treatment was given toward the Anglo renter in service and prices.

Several teachers from the Bureau of Indian Education and the Cuba Independent School District came to Torreon Chapter House to express their concerns of the education modalities utilized in their school district, whose student body is predominately comprised of Navajo students.

Cuba Independent School District Teacher Novalene Meyers told Commissioners that speaking the Navajo language is discouraged in classroom instruction.

“The Navajo language is very important, it helps the students understand,” Meyers said.

Meyers says statewide standardized tests utilize illustrations that may be common to students who grew up in urban areas but are foreign to students who grew up on the reservation, therefore leading to misunderstandings that categorize Navajo students as illiterate and are being placed in special education course work.

The NNHRC will be conducting public hearings in Tohajilee, Alamo, Grants and Gallup in mid-July. Please visit the NNHRC website at www.nnhrc.navajo.org for updates on the hearing schedule or to download a complaint form.

For more information about the NNHRC contact Public Information Officer Sheree Peshlakai at (928)871-7436.

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