

Socializing big part of Election Day for Navajos

FLAGSTAFF (AP) — On the Navajo Nation, people don't go to the polls just to vote.

For many of them, it's one of the few times a year where they meet up with old friends, chat about the government, community needs and their families.

"There's a lot of socializing," said Edison Wauneka, director of the Navajo Election Administration. "I think a majority of the people want to come back, those who live in urban areas, because there's where they can see their friends and relatives."

Voters can expect campaigns to court them at numerous chapter houses on Nov. 4 outside polling stations, offering traditional fry bread and mutton stew. Some candidates also flip hamburgers and give away hot dogs, pizza and soft drinks, but the traditional food is a big draw, said Ben Silversmith, executive director of the tribe's government development office.

"If you're going to work with people as an official, you show gratitude and interest in people," Silversmith said. "That's just part of the tradition."

Wauneka says the practice has been standard ever since the tribe began requiring candidates to file for positions in the 1970s. Before then, candidates for tribal offices were nominated. On the ballot this year are chapter presidents, vice presidents, and grazing committee, farm board, school board and land board members.

A ballot that includes the U.S. presidential race usually draws even more Navajos to the polls, Wauneka has said. More than 110,000 of the tribe's roughly 300,000 members are registered to vote.

Getting to the polls can be an obstacle for some tribal members who lack transportation and live in remote communities far from polling sites. The Navajo Nation is the country's largest Indian reservation at 27,000 square miles. It extends into Arizona, New Mexico and Utah and is about the size of West Virginia.

Navajos who live off the reservation often go back to their communities to vote for local officials.

Tribal employees are given two hours of administrative leave to vote, though Navajo President Joe Shirley Jr. has recommended they have the entire day off to vote and help others get to the polls.

Delma Kalleco, a community health representative at the tribe's Coyote Canyon Chapter in New Mexico, said there's always a constant stream of people at polling sites chatting with candidates about their plans. Serving food, she said, is part of Navajo tradition that predates elections.

"It's our tradition to be good and offer something to drink or eat and then have them continue their journey," she said. "It's a big thing on the reservation."

Silversmith remembers days when candidates used to butcher animals and wrap the meat into meal sizes, give out jewelry and other things to entice voters. But even if voters stop by a booth to grab a bite to eat and don't vote for that candidate, there's never any hard feelings, he said.

Wauneka doubts that candidates still prepare food in an effort to buy votes.

"A majority of the candidates do that," he said. "It made it so there's really no advantage anymore."

Silversmith begs to differ. "The more you put out, the more votes you get, that type of approach," he said. "The more you're seen out in public, the more votes you get. I still think the idea of buying votes is still there."

Pine Hill Health Center earns Harvard award

PHOENIX (AP) — "Epitomizing success in the face of challenge, each of the Honoring Nations program validates the genius of our Native peoples and our abilities to meet the issues of present time, as we ensure healthy futures and honor connections to our traditions" said Chief Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Indian Nation and chairman of the Honoring Nations Board of Governors while Pine Hill Health Center's Cancer Awareness and Prevention Program was receiving its High Honors award and \$20,000 from the Harvard University John F. Kennedy School of Government on October 21, 2008. The honoring ceremony was held in conjunction with the 65th Convention of the National Congress of American Indians in Phoenix. Hundreds of guests from around the world including the countries of South Africa, Chile, Brazil, China and Argentina to name a few, came to learn from the awardees and witness the recognition of the good governance achievements.

Only five High Honors programs each received \$20,000, from a nomination of 111 programs representing 69 Indian Nations. Five Honors programs from the same nominees each received \$10,000. The nominees went through an arduous process which began

in January 2008. According to the Harvard Honoring Nations program, "the exemplary governance programs are critiqued on sovereignty, cultural relevance, transferability and sustainability." In addition to judging the written contents of the application, an on-site visit

is conducted and at the final stage, a public presentation is made by each of the top ten nominees. The representatives from Pine Hill made an excellent public presentation in Phoenix.

Originally established in 1978 by the Ramah Navajo

School Board, Inc., Pine Hill Health Center serves primarily the Ramah Band of Navajos and is the first Indian controlled Health Center in the Nation. It serves a population of 4,000 in a very rural setting that is approximately 45 miles one way from the near-

est hospital. According to written Harvard Honoring Nations literature, "The Pine Hill Health Center staff recognized that breast cancer is the second leading cause of death for American Indian woman and therefore initiated its Mammography Days to provide culturally relevant breast and cervical cancer screenings. The services are offered in the English and Navajo languages, includes door-to-door transportation, medical exams, health education sessions, and follow-up. It also includes social activities like quilting. Without this essential program, few women in the Ramah community would receive a preventive health education." Pine Hill Health Center also received a Regional Impact Award at the 2007 National Indian Health conference in September at Portland, Oregon for its entire health programs.

Other 2008 High Honors awardees are: Choctaw Nation's Project Falvmichhi, Tohono O'odham Nation's Archie Hendricks Senior Skilled Nursing Facility / Hospice; Muscogee Creek Nation's Reintegration Program; and the Osage Nation's Government Reform Initiative.

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JLuna/Courtesy Photo

"Pine Hill Health Center earns Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government High Honors". Left to Right: Jolene Luna, Janie Beaver, Maxine Peshlakai, Glennetta Jake-Henio, Pearl Alonzo, Beverly J. Coho, Carolyn Finster; not pictured Marlene Martinez.

Supreme Court hears American Indian land case

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rhode Island officials told the Supreme Court on Monday that permitting the federal government to hold land owned by the Narragansett Indian Tribe would undercut the state's criminal, safety and zoning laws.

State leaders fear if the 31-acre lot is governed by tribal and federal law, they would lose jurisdiction over it. The tribe could then build a casino on the land or create a tax-free zone that would hurt the state's revenues. Casinos are banned under state law, but tribes can build and operate them on lands held in federal trust.

Justices stepped into the dispute over the federal government's ability to take land into trust for American Indian tribes in a closely watched case that could have a dramatic impact on how tribes recognized after the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act are allowed to buy, govern and use land.

Rhode Island argued that federal law prevents the federal government from taking

land into trust for American Indian tribes recognized after the 1934 act. The Narragansetts became a federally recognized tribe in 1983.

"What the government is asking for is the exact opposite of what the statute clearly requires," said former Solicitor General Theodore Olson, arguing for the state.

The Bush administration said the act allows it to take land into trust for tribes regardless of when they were recognized.

"The Narragansett Tribe is a tribe as that term is defined separately in the act," said Deanne E. Maynard, assistant to the Solicitor General.

Olson cited language in the act that said it applied to "all persons of Indian descent who are members of any recognized Indian tribe now under federal jurisdiction." Olson said the word "now" was clearly a reference to 1934.

Justice Stephen Breyer questioned Olson's view, citing the example of posters reading "Give Blood Now."

"It doesn't mean when it

was printed," said Breyer.

Rhode Island and 21 other states claim the administration is overreaching. They want the court to set firm limits. They warn that trust lands can alter the character of surrounding communities, especially when casino income allows tribes to embark on major projects.

The fight centers on whether a land parcel in Charlestown, R.I., purchased by the Narragansetts in 1991 should be subject to Rhode Island law, including a prohibition on casino gambling, or whether the parcel should be governed by tribal and federal law.

The Narragansetts purchased the land to build an elderly housing complex, which remains incomplete.

The state objected when the tribe, which has unsuccessfully sought approval to build a casino in Rhode Island, asked the U.S. Department of the Interior to hold that land in trust.

The case is *Carcieri v. Kempthorne*, 07-526.

Cut-off land claims settled with four B.C. First Nations

CBC News

CANADA — The B.C. government has struck a deal to return lands cut off from First Nations reserves nearly a century ago under what was known as the McKenna-McBride commission of 1912-1916.

Aboriginal relations Minister Mike de Jong said the agreements settle the last of 22 historic claims that took more than 40 years to resolve.

"These agreements with the Seton Lake Indian Band, Gitwankak Band Council, Metlakatla Band and Lax Kw'alaams Indian Band, dating back more than 90 years, grew out of our collective desire to make right the past and achieve lasting reconciliation," said de Jong on Tuesday.

"I can think of no better way to celebrate B.C.'s 150th anniversary than by closing the book on the McKenna-McBride cut-off claims, which stem from the early decades of our province's history."

The deal was another in a long series of agreements the B.C. Liberal government has struck since Premier Gordon Campbell began aggressively pursuing a so-called new relationship with First Nations.

While the agreement is being hailed as a major step forward, native leaders, such as former Chief Gary John of the Seton Lake band, were cautious in their praise.

"So far, in my honest opinion, the new relationship doesn't look very new yet, but we're hopeful, and we're optimistic that this is going to be the beginning of something more," said John.

"We are glad to put this difficult time in our history behind us," said Seton Lake Indian Band Chief Larry Casper Jr.

"We now move towards a future where our children can

see that negotiations have a positive effect, and we look forward to continuing dialogue with the province on other issues."

Under the terms of the deal, the Seton Lake band, which is located 20 kilometres northwest of Lillooet in the southern Interior, won't get the original land back since some of it is now in private hands.

Instead, the band will get about 13 hectares of land and \$600,000. John said the cash won't cover the cost of buying back all the land because it has become far too expensive in recent years.

"They said the land was worthless. Now, 80 years later, all of a sudden here we are, and the land is priceless beyond our imagination," said John.

Under the deal, the Gitwankak Band Council, a Gitksan nation located at the junction of the Yellowhead and Cassiar highways in the northern Interior, will also get 7.6 hectares of the original cut-off lands, along with financial compensation of \$350,000 from the federal government and the province.

The Metlakatla and Lax Kw'alaams Bands, both located near Prince Rupert, will receive provincial land parcels totalling 4,755 hectares, as well as \$150,000 for each band. Metlakatla will also get an additional settlement of approximately \$3,000.

"For nearly 100 years, over 20 First Nations have endeavoured to right the wrong of the cut-off claims," said Chief Harold Leighton of the Metlakatla Indian Band.

"We are happy to stand with British Columbia and Canada today to celebrate the resolution of these claims and to move forward now with greater certainty toward a shared future," said Leighton.

First Nations group calls for inquiry into police shootings

CBC News

CANADA — Delbert Pelletier died after being shot by an RCMP sniper following a lengthy standoff on a First Nations reserve.

Aboriginal leaders in Saskatchewan are calling for a public inquiry into the deaths of First Nations people who have been shot by police.

The call comes in the wake of last week's coroner's inquest into the 2006 death of Delbert Pelletier, which some family members said left questions unanswered.

Pelletier, 44, was shot by RCMP at his home two years ago at his home after a lengthy standoff at Muskowekwan First Nation, about 150 kilometres northeast of Regina.

The inquest heard a police sniper say he shot Pelletier after seeing him

come out of the house with a rifle and pointing it at a police vehicle.

The inquest jury made several recommendations, including consulting elders and family members during dangerous situations.

Since Pelletier's death, three other aboriginal people in the province have died after being shot by police. Another four were shot, but survived.

Questions unanswered, FSIN says

The Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations said a public inquiry is needed to try to figure out how to end what it calls a disturbing trend.

"This is not just a First Nation issue," FSIN vice-chief Morley Watson said.

"This is a Saskatchewan issue, and we would hope that the provincial government

would step up to the plate, work with us and hopefully, that collectively, we can find some of the answers that remain unanswered at this time."

According to Watson and Pelletier's family, the process didn't answer such questions as whether police could have handled the standoff differently.

"I just think it's been an unfair process," Pelletier's sister-in-law Melanie Fisher said. "You have to hear both sides to a story, and we felt that they just heard their side and not our side, that's why we feel that an inquiry would be best. Because the probing questions would be asked."

Fisher and the FSIN both said they expect it will be difficult to convince the provincial government to hold a public inquiry.