

### **NM State Representative Sandra Jeff Weighs in on Horse Controversy**

It is clear based on yesterday's statements by the Navajo Nation that the political grandstanding by former Governor Bill Richardson and others is not based on fact or true sources, says Representative Sandra Jeff, Crownpoint.

With the decreases in federal funding the Indian tribes in New Mexico and across the West are becoming more burdened with the real and growing problem of the number of horses within the tribal lands. The insufficient management of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Bureau of Land Management have contributed to the problem as well, says Jeff.

"Our leaders were elected to federal posts to represent our interests. I would hope that they bear in mind our tribal support of the Roswell facility and this critical issue of the responsible care of these animals," says Jeff.

In the 2013 State Legislature, Representative Paul Bandy, Aztec, presented House Joint Memorial 16 to undertake a study of the feasibility of humane horse slaughter and processing facilities being established in New Mexico. There was bipartisan support of the measure were among many representatives including Representative Jeff.

"I stood in support on the House Floor in a most contentious debate, explaining to the body that the issue was of utmost importance due to the growing uncontrolled overpopulation of unwanted horses reaching numbers of over 70,000," says Representative Jeff.

The Navajo understand this issue unlike the activists, such as movie actor Robert Redford who creates a vision of the magnificent West, but have no experience with real life on the land, she stated. The Navajo were the original stewards of the lands and have lived here on them and coexisted with the animals for centuries. "These people want to tell us how to manage our land and our lives, but are unwilling to provide the financial backing to fund their agendas. They would rather spend their money on lawsuits and chase media," charges Jeff.

Additionally, there is health and safety concerns for livestock being raised by tribal members on native lands, as well as the sacredness of the increasingly sparse water supply. Hand-dug earthen dams are all that supplies the livestock with this precious commodity in some places, she continues.

"The feral horses are destroying these and fences in an attempt to get at crops and feed, making many things unusable for the productive livestock that tribal members rely on for their livelihoods," Jeff continued.

"These feral horses are not domesticated nor are these horses considered pets, while many such as Governor Martinez would have you believe otherwise," says Representative Jeff.

As to the concern of narcotics in the horse tissues expressed by New Mexico Attorney General Gary King, there is no presence of them in the reservation horses. The horse processing facility in Roswell would be an invaluable economic opportunity for this state. The Navajo is currently auctioning their animals that are being transported to Mexico for slaughter. The inhumanity of this transport and the horse slaughter facilities in Mexico would warrant any alternative facility in the U.S.

The horse is sacred to the Navajo. Once a native horse owner has passed on, his or her horse is put down out of respect for the bond between man and animal.

"As a regular witness to the horrible horse deaths by starvation, I am devastated. We must do better. There is a balance in these lands and it must be maintained through better management of the horses and a true understanding of the circle of life," concludes Representative Jeff.