

## Coming Together: The Tribal Latino Caucus Summit

by María González Mabbutt

*In our Fall 2002 issue, Views profiled Idaho Latino Vote: "Developing the Next Generation of Leaders." At the time, Idaho Latino Vote Director María González Mabbutt said, "Registration and Latino voter participation are just the first steps in influencing the lawmaking process. After the election, it is clearly our intent to be around." One of the twelve groups in Western States Center's VOTE Project, Idaho Latino Vote continues its work this year. Here, Mabbutt describes a key new partnership with Idaho's native communities.*

History was made in January at Idaho's first-ever Tribal Latino Caucus Summit. Together the Latino and Native communities of Idaho comprise about 11 percent of the population. The Summit brought together over 150 members of these communities to explore ways to combine their power to affect policy change.

Organized in less than two months, the Summit was funded by the Coeur d'Alene, Nez Perce, and Shoshone-Paiute Tribal Councils, with participation from the Kootenai, and Shoshone-Bannock. Additional funders for the Summit were the Idaho Hispanic Caucus and the Idaho Migrant Council. It was the first major undertaking of the Tribal Latino Caucus (TLC), formed in September 2003.

### Unifying Themes

TLC organizers developed the Summit to reflect key themes that brought the caucus together:

- Recognizing shared characteristics between the communities (such as facing policies of colonialism, racism and disenfranchisement over centuries);
- Addressing shared problems within each community (such as underemployment, access to education, poor health, disproportionate incarceration rates, etc.);
- Together the two communities can address both governmental policy solutions, and internal community solutions.

The event kicked off with a cultural reception that involved traditional dancing, singing and speeches including appearances by elected officials. Once the politicians left, the evening really

started to flow and participants stayed until the very end enjoying the music and dancing. It helped to bring individuals together in these two communities that hadn't had much contact previously but intend to work together to effect change this year.

Friday's panel presentations and strategy discussions focused on three topics of common concern: public education, public safety and health care. Saturday's workshops on Voter Activation and Running for Office were introduced by Judge Sergio Gutierrez, Idaho's only Latino judge, who has held positions as District Judge and now as Court of Appeals Judge through three elections after his initial appointment. Eight participants indicated an interest in running for public office. Many of the fifteen organizations attending agreed to work together on voter activation plans.

The closing plenary took on a spiritual tone. The cameras, politicians, and curious were gone and it was the people who wanted to do the work who were left in the room. We knew the challenges before us. We also knew the serious consequences for our communities of being pushed out of the public debate. These first steps were truly exciting steps toward making our communities heard and understood.

Since the Summit, the Tribal Latino Caucus has met and will continue to work on issues and in voter registration, education and mobilization.

*María González Mabbutt, organizer of Idaho Latino Vote, is a member of the Western States Center board of directors.*

### History Was Made (top to bottom)

- Sam Penny of the Nez Perce tribe at press conference announcing TLC Summit.
- Leo Morales (left) of ICAN with Idaho State Appellate Court Judge Sergio Gutierrez.
- Shoshone-Paiute drummers at TLC dinner and opening ceremonies.
- María González Mabbutt facilitating a workshop.

