

### **A Tigua Woman's Perspective on Women Voting at YDSP**

I am honored to be invited to prepare an opinion on a woman's role at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo (YDSP). Unfortunately, the timeframe for preparation did not give me the ability to fully articulate all of the prevalent issues that come to mind, although I will attempt to address some of the most important issues that I as a Tigua woman see.

As a Tigua woman, it is my obligation to educate and develop myself in a manner where I can provide for and meet the needs of my people. That is my purpose. I have come to realize that my purpose is greater than myself. This greater purpose is to work for what the tribe needs to preserve its way of life, its beliefs, systems, economy and sovereignty. Yet, my work has afforded me the pride, accomplishments and recognition that one needs for "self" identity. However, for many Tigua women their purpose is not the same as mine. Many women at the Pueblo are advisors to the community, mediators, preparers of the feasts, and keepers of traditional roles of women in the community. I started my life as a simple member of the tribal community a daughter, a sister, a mother, a neighbor, and a friend to fellow tribal members and all those roles that contribute to the simple ways of Pueblo life and the roles that some women are (or were) naturally and culturally expected to fill in the Tigua community, but over time my role changed.

I began my work at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo in a clerical position and in time, I developed into a Nation Builder and a Community Builder - a person whose role it is to prepare the tribe for its future and its relations with the modern world. I went on to earn a Masters of Business Administration from the University of Texas at El Paso. I play a major role in economic development initiatives and major role in the development of the judicial system.

Ysleta del Sur Pueblo has always thought of itself as a sovereign with autonomy in the ways that it governs itself and makes decisions for its people. It is a culturally and traditionally rich community. Unlike (or like) other societies, at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo all people feel a connection to each other and the tribe. I am a contributor and a participator in many areas of the Pueblo. My role as a Pueblo administrator is wide ranging and includes cultural, traditional, preservation, administrative, economic concerns and subject matter.

If and when ... because we anticipate that will take place when the time is right .... women vote, I will be a leader and participator in that process. However, until that time is here and right for the Pueblo, I do not feel disenfranchised. I am an opinionated, strong, educated leader that is grateful for my role in my community. I also feel that the system and community roles at Ysleta del Sur Pueblo is that, in the face of all obstacles, has permitted the very survival and existence of the tribe for over 400

years. The tribe is often misunderstood, misconstrued, treated in a hostile manner and or just plain ignored, but through will and tenacity we have continued to thrive and exist as a Native American Pueblo community.

When outsiders hear that women do not vote (in the manner that other democratic societies vote) unfortunately all they hear is that they do not vote. Nevertheless, I have a voice at YDSP, I make law and policy. I play a major role in paramount administrative decisions and at the same time participate at traditional Pueblo Juntas where women recommend that certain acts or persons (men) be recalled due to conflicts or conduct not in keeping with the Pueblo's ways. These Juntas are also means of gathering and building consensus on issues vital to the Pueblo, this is a forum for Pueblo democracy where Tigua women participate. It is a built in systemic feature. Women are also active in dispute resolution for the community.

The existence of these tribal laws and systems are oral, but nonetheless law and the processes for the Pueblo to provide the balance that people external to the tribe may not see or understand. For the Pueblo, separation of powers comes in many forms other than that of a preconceived idea of democracy. The manner in which the Pueblo balances its powers is an expression and exercise of Tribal Sovereignty. However, the tribe is fully aware that it operates within a modern society. For this we have written law in the form of judicial codes, law and order codes, peace codes, youth codes, corporation codes and the systems and practices necessary to conduct business and relations with other individuals and jurisdictions and thrive in a modern society.

Time may change processes, and systems for the Pueblo, but the Pueblo will determine how and when it is best to deal with these changes. That is our Sovereign right.