



MEDIA RELEASE

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A Tradition of Native American Housing

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U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Hosted a Recovery Act Listening Session at the NAIHC Legal Symposium

*Assistant Secretary of Community Planning and Development Mercedes Marquez
opened up the session*

LAS VEGAS, Nev.—December 10, 2009—The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC), the only national Indian organization solely advocating on tribal housing, opened the morning session of its Legal Symposium to an *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* (ARRA) listening session with top officials from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Energy (DOE) and tribal housing professionals. The focus of the session was to hear the concerns and suggestions from the tribes that have received ARRA housing grants.

“We are most thankful that several federal agency representatives reached out to NAIHC to hold outreach and listening sessions at this year’s Legal Symposium. The dialogue was definitely useful and informative,” said NAIHC Chairman Marty Shuravloff. “The fact that Assistant Secretary Marquez attended the meeting, and that HUD officials wanted to hear straight from tribal housing authorities shows HUD’s dedication and commitment to providing adequate resources to tribes for safe and healthy homes.”

HUD Community Planning and Development Assistant Secretary Mercedes Marquez opened up the listening session by extending respect and friendship to tribes, and expressing the department’s pledge to help tribes with all its issues across the Federal agencies.

“It’s a huge opportunity for HUD to work with Indian Country, and the Community Planning and Development department may be able to bring more resources to tribal housing,” Assistant Secretary Marquez said. “Today’s session is a time to tell us specifically what you need and we’ll report back to HUD. Tell us what models are working for you, so we can help replicate it in other tribal areas.”

Bibi Hidalgo, Manager of the Economic Recovery Commission and Partnerships with HUD facilitated the session. Also representing HUD was Elizabeth Willmott, senior program manager for the Economic Recovery; Eric Hornbuckle from Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control; and Jennifer Bullough, director of the Office of Grants Evaluation in the Office of Native American Programs. Joe Garcia, director of the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity represented DOE, and offered insight on the “green retrofit” initiative.

Tribal housing professionals took advantage of the opportunity to interact with HUD and DOE representatives. Many northern tribes expressed that weatherizing homes is huge, costly problem, which they face every year. Many said their respective housing authority is trying to build or maintain energy-efficient homes but grants are limited or too competitive.

“Where I’m from we have seven to eight months of winter. We need heating and air ventilation systems, but that’s big money. We also need to train occupants on how to use the equipment correctly, but that costs too,” said Cheryl Parish, NAIHC Vice-Chair and Executive Director of the Bay Mills Tribal Housing Authority in Michigan. “There should be an allowance to help resolve these problems. Many residents worry that they can’t afford the bills, so they don’t run ventilation. The bottom line is this—we need more money.”

Many conference attendees said that the HUD and DOE grant process is lengthy and is not amenable to the tribes’ limited resources.

“Many of the tribes have never had an opportunity to get money for building homes since the inception of Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act,” Vice-Chair Parish said. “These tribes now have a chance to apply for competitive funds, but they have no experience with procurement, which is a limitation.”

HUD and DOE representatives agreed that the appropriate officials will hear all tribal concerns expressed, and many follow-ups will be made in the coming months.

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The National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC) was founded in 1974 as a 501(c)(3) corporation. NAIHC is the only national organization representing housing interests of Native people who reside in Indian communities, Alaska Native Villages, and on native Hawaiian Home Lands.