



When Indians Vote, America Wins!

"Pres on the Res" is the first project of INDN's List Education Fund that brings together all the Democratic presidential candidates and elected tribal leaders throughout the United States. It's an opportunity to educate the next President of the United States on issues that face Indian Country and help chart a new course to follow so that the well-being and best interest for American Indians are met. The goal of INDN's List is to elect candidates of every level to government whether it's state, local or federal. INDN's List, pronounced "Indian's List", was founded by Kalyn Free, after her unsuccessful run for Congress in 2005 for Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional District. Democratic Rep. Dan Boren won the seat. Free obtained her law degree from the University of Oklahoma and was a District Attorney from 1998 – 2002.

Her passion for making the world a better place for Indian people is what her main drive force is for creating INDN's List. "I know that until Indians are represented at all levels of public office, that our voices will not be heard, our issues will continue to be marginalized, Indian Country and our people will suffer. We must break into the circles of power and have our own people championing our issues." Free says. "Giving our money and our votes to non-Indian candidates [although we have many friends in legislative circles who have fought for and continue to for our interest] is simply not working for us," stated Free. She also noted the fact that there is no one better to tell our stories and address our needs than the people from our own communities. All over the United States there are many bright, talented and passionate individuals who will represent the American Indian race so well in the political arena. All they need

are the skills and resources to run professional, modern campaigns to get their messages to the voters. INDN's List is patterned from EMILY's List, an organization for female candidates who are running for Congress. It is the only national organization dedicated to election Democratic American Indians and endorses

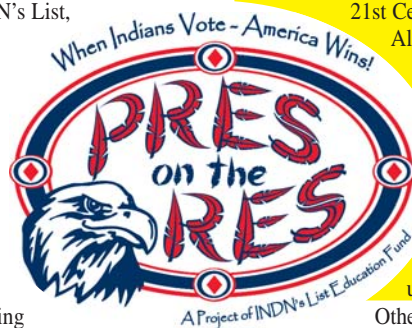
candidates who are enrolled members of a federally recognized tribe. Wisconsin is just one state where INDN's List is actively recruiting and training candidates. There are NO Indians serving in the Wisconsin legislature; INDN's List wants to change that in 2008. Therefore, they are asking the Indian nations of Wisconsin to help recruit potential candidates immediately. Patty Hoef was not officially endorsed by INDN's List, but did attend the Campaign Camp 2005. Hoef learned how to run a successful campaign. She was the secretary of the Oneida Tribe of Indians before being elected to the Brown County Board of Supervisors.

In October 2005 INDN's List held its very first Campaign Camp ever in Shakopee, Minn. That year the camp successfully brought three members to Congress. The purpose of the camp is to focus national attention on the issues that are important to Indian Country.

INDN's List has a four step strategy that it follows. The first step is recruiting. "A lot of recruiting gets done through personal connections," says Free. Free is a Democratic National Committee (DNC) member who was appointed by Howard Dean. Free is actively involved with Democratic politics on a national level. She is a participant in the National Congress of American Indians which allows her to meet and work with many Indian leaders. "Starting about a year before elections we begin calling current Indian legislators up for re-election and seeking suggestions for possible Indian candidates. And through the grapevine, many Indians are coming to us, supporting our organization and showing interest in utilizing our tools to make their own run for public office," Free says about the recruiting process. "We look for Indians committed to serving the public generally and Indians particularly, who have an understanding of the problems facing Indian Country, appre-

ciation for issues of tribal sovereignty and share our outlook. Indians interest are very often American interests," she adds.

The next step is to train the candidates. At Campaign Camp 2005, participants were trained by some of the best political consultants in the country. Those included were major organizations like Wellstone Action, Democracy for American, EMILY's List and 21st Century Democrats.



All of the trainings include sessions on fundraising, targeting, direct mail, message, field organizing, canvassing, phone banks and using a voter file.

Other trainings consist of working with the tribes, local and state parties. Candidates learn how to build a political resume and "get out the vote" (GOTV) tactics. "We also counsel candidates over the phone, in person and travel to the field work with campaigns on the ground as they encounter the myriad obstacles that occur during a political campaign. We sponsor smaller training events throughout the year in conjunction with other progressive activists," said Free. All the participants who completed the Campaign Camp received a certificate of completion along with the knowledge that they acquired during their stay.

After the candidates get the training they will need to run a successful campaign they are educated in the funding process. The funding comes from major supporters throughout Indian Country, Oklahoma based labor organizations and individual donors. Last year, the Forest County Potawatomi Community was just one of many tribes that stepped forward in support of INDN's List and made the initial \$25,000 contribution. Free had mentioned that candidates and campaigns are one and the same. She added that INDN's List has not yet organized or participated in a campaign on particular issues or a specific agenda. "As we move into GOTV and voter mobilization, the cost of running a

national mobilization effort will exceed the cost of any individual campaign. We do not singlehandedly fund any candidate's campaign. We are restricted both by campaign finance laws (which vary from state to state) and by our own sense that it's important for candidates to connect with their constituents through the grueling ordeal called campaign fundraising," replied Free when asked about funding.

The last step is to mobilize the voters. This process is referred to as GOTV (get out the vote). INDN's List has mobilized the voters simply by supporting strong, forward-thinking candidates with a vision that connects with and appeals to voters. When INDN's List finds and sponsors the best candidates, this helps get the voters excited and mobilize the voters all by itself. "We are preparing to expand our efforts to active voter mobilization in anticipation of the upcoming 2008 presidential election," says Free.

There will be organizers placed in key battleground states that have significant Indian populations such as Wisconsin, Washington, the Dakotas, New Mexico, Minnesota and Florida. INDN's List Education Fund organizers, provides the areas with voter registration drives, forums, voter education, and then personal contact to get voters to the polls.

"Indians who are interested in working on this project, NAN (Native American Network) are encouraged to contact us immediately, to submit an application to Campaign Camp 2007. Our NAN staffers must attend Campaign Camp in order to be considered for hiring for the 2008 election cycle," stated Free. INDN's List is still looking for a location to host Campaign Camp 2007 where they will hold a presidential forum for the first time. This will give elected tribal officials the opportunity to meet directly with and speak to our presidential candidates about issues that we as American Indians face today.

Sources for this article came from an interview with Kalyn Free, "The Story Teller" and "News From The Land Of The Free" which are newsletters from INDN's List. For more information on INDN's List Education Fund, its projects or to make a monetary contribution go to www.indnlist.org.