



Washington State University NAWA Panel

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Native Panelists Address Violence Against Women

by Faith Price

The WSU Native American Women's Association (NAWA) brought together a panel of distinguished Native women to address violence against indigenous women during the annual Week Without Violence put on by the Coalition of Women Students.

The evening of Friday October 18, panelists Juliana Repp (Nez Perce), Paulette Jordan (Coeur d'Alene) and Jody Pepion (Blackfeet) shared their insight into violence in Native communities during "Hn'Laqh'n: Supporting Native Woman Survivors of Violence Panel." Hn'Laqh'n is the Coeur d'Alene word for friendship, chosen by NAWA to express sisterhood and solidarity with survivors, explained NAWA chair Tillie Torpey.



(l-r): Panelists Juliana Repp, Paulette Jordan, and Jody Pepion listen to a question from NAWA senator, Annita Lucchesi (foreground, left).

The conversation covered domestic violence, historical trauma, and the importance of being politically active. Attorney Juliana Repp started the evening off discussing some of the domestic violence cases she's seen during her career in the legal system. Repp graduated one of two Native American students from the law school at Gonzaga, and then began her career as a public defender on the Colville Reservation.

She shared the story of a case that was "probably one of the most difficult parts of my legal career ever." It involved a woman who was beaten so badly by her husband that she was on life support in Spokane. Repp assisted the woman's mother in gaining custody of her daughter so she could be taken off of life support. Otherwise, Repp explained, the husband was "next of kin" and taking her off of life support meant the difference between him facing attempted murder charges or murder charges.

Repp also discussed the Violence Against Women Act that was re-authorized in March 2013, and gives tribes the jurisdiction to prosecute non-Indian perpetrators residing on tribal lands, a loophole that had previously allowed some offenders to avoid charges.

"This will be a huge benefit to tribal courts," said Repp, explaining that they will now be able to handle all domestic violence crimes that occur in their communities.

Paulette Jordan, a member of the Coeur d'Alene tribal council who recently ran for the state of Idaho House of Representatives, knows one of the individuals who helped draft much of the language of the 2013 Violence Against Women Act.

"I never saw a bill passed in Indian Country with so much emotion," said Jordan. "It brought our people together."

Jordan said she encourages young people, especially women, to get involved in politics as a way to serve their people and bring about change, noting that it was women in Congress who ended the recent government shutdown. Lastly, Dr. Jody Pepion, a WSU alumna, described how some of the knowledge she gained as a student helped her understand the struggles of her tribal community.

Growing up, Dr. Pepion said she had questions about poor treatment of Natives by both non-Natives and Natives themselves.

"I started watching the Brady Bunch and wondering, 'Why is it that our families didn't have that communication? Why didn't

my parents say, 'I love you,?'" said Pepion.

At the same time, she observed the actions and qualities of a highly respected tribal elder, thinking, "This is how we're supposed to be – accepting, kind, giving, loving, political, knowledgeable, and a teacher."

At WSU, she had the opportunity to take a Women's Studies course that gave her insight into her people. The course introduced her to the concept of "internal oppression," – where members of an oppressed group come to believe the stereotypes and misinformation that society communicates to them, and accept it as a part of their self-image.

"We survived the largest genocide in the history of this world," stated Pepion.

Jordan also spoke on the historical trauma passed on in her own family as a result of her grandmother's experience in boarding school.

"It's now about change. We've adapted," Jordan stated. "Now we're able to thrive through all that historical trauma. It's a good day to be Indian."

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