

Denver UNITY Conference

As a student in the Phoenix Union High School District, I was given the opportunity by Gregory Mendoza to go to a UNITY Conference which was held in Denver, Colorado. During my trip, I was very excited and prepared to learn more about Native American Youth Leadership in the United States and how everything worked. The first day of the Conference when my group arrived around 6 PM (Post Meridian), we had gone into the convention center and waited until the opening ceremony and the grand entry of all the tribes around the country which also included a group of individuals from Taiwan. We had tribes from Great Plains, Midwest, Northeast, Northwest, Pacific, Rocky Mountains, Southeast, Southern Plains, Southwest, and Western region all coming from around the US. Also, we were introduced to the new UNITY mascot the UNITY eagle and were also introduced to the DJ Emcee One (Marcus Guinn), we even got the chance to see The Thompson Brothers Lacrosse and they talked to all of us about school and getting an education so that we can inspire others to do the same to boost our culture and strengthen who we are as an Indigenous people.

Every morning we would have a general session which consisted of a morning prayer and our UNITY news. On the 7th we were able to talk about a Panel discussion "Social Justice and Racial Healing" from 3 different representatives from different tribes and we all had a chance to ask questions about Standing Rock which was really good for everyone there and I thought that it was a good chance for some of us to express

our thoughts and opinions to those who are there for us. Later on that day, we were shown a new Wellness Warriors app for our phones that can track different things for us other than just physical fitness it also measures mental and spiritual fitness for inside of us than just what's on the outside and for everyone to be able to have something like this is especially beneficial to us because we all need to be strong in every way possible because that's how our ancestors were and how we as the youth need to bring back as it becoming more and more difficult to bring back what our ancestors have worked for. Another thing that I felt was really calming and available to us was the UNITY fire that we all could visit at some point to pray, clear our minds, and think about those around us.

The next day we would all work on our physical development so we had our usual general session then we had our speeches for male and female co-president. Then we had a very interesting presentation from a youth delegation who were from Taiwan and they showed us different cultural events they do in Taiwan for ceremonies or celebrations. Also, we had talk from Mary Kim Titla and John Echohawk about building our UNITY together not just between the youth and everyone that was around us but for those who are at home and our families that are on the reservations that we need to help in times especially today. On the 9th, we would work on our Mental development and we had a meeting about cultural wellness which we all would come to know is to keep our ways that those tried to destroy or take away because we are a strong and Indigenous people and we have always kept our traditional ways and now we are fighting to keep them and pass on to those who are coming of age to learn and

preserve those ways which we keep sacred. We had workshops that day also and I had to a musical workshop where they talked about their past and how they came to be in the present time and they explained to us what they believed kept them going and how some things in their life had changed them. That night also was the night we had the banquet and we had a celebration for the gala being the 41st and the 41st UNITY conference. The next day was the closing day of the conference and during the last hours everyone in the convention center had shaken hands with every person in the room and we all went out to the UNITY fire and continued on with the closing ceremony and we were all blessed and told that we have to be the change in our communities today for our culture that we are clinging onto dearly because it's who we are as a people. I really enjoyed this experience and I really liked how the conference was set up and how everyone was able to talk amongst each other and smile and be close like a big family and how everyone worked together on activities we had during the conference, but the only part that was a little difficult on all of us were the hours we had to rest and then be up again to be at the conference which was kind of difficult as my group sometimes came sluggish and exhausted.

