

**Testimony of Oklahoma State Senator, Chairman of Appropriations****Enoch Kelly Haney****Before the House Committee on Resources****October 17, 2001**

I am honored to be here today to provide testimony to this Committee relating to House Resolution 2742, authorizing the construction of a Native American Cultural Center & Museum in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

The vision for such a special place began several years ago when, in 1994, the Oklahoma Legislature created the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority to build and operate the Native American Cultural Center & Museum. However, this vision took on a life of its own many years ago. There has been a longtime, profound expression of needs, hopes and expectations of Oklahomans, Native and non-Native people alike regarding the existence and operation of a Native American Cultural Center & Museum in Oklahoma, a central place to unify and connect our Tribal governments as well as place to tell a story...a story of many tribes from many places. Oklahoma is now home to these diverse and distinct peoples.

There is a great need to develop a Center to tell the story of the tribes in Oklahoma, to perpetuate Native American art, to nurture cultural concepts and practices, and, in general, to educate people on the Native culture across the Nation. The added benefit is a stronger economic base for Oklahoma because of increased tourism activity. There is no doubt that such a place is needed. This concept has been discussed and dreamed about for many years by many who feel that such a center should be located in Oklahoma, because of its central location in the United States. Oklahoma is also home to 39 tribal governments and is home to many more Native people who are members of tribes outside of the State or tribes whose history is tied to Oklahoma, as it was once known as Indian Territory.

Historically, Oklahoma was home to five indigenous tribes. The rest of the tribes are in Oklahoma because of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Our Federal Government played a significant role in this unique history. We are all at a time of healing...and it is time to tell a story. The Oklahoma story is a compelling one. It tells of many tribes from many diverse cultures, backgrounds, and regions. It is, in itself, a testimony of devastation, struggle, courage, survival and victory.

The vision of telling such a story is now being carried through by the people who have become a part of the project. This group of people not only consists of the Staff and Board of Directors of the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority; but, it also consists of the people of Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Indian community and tribal governments, as well as the collective voice of tribal governments nationwide. To date, we have received support through formal Resolutions from our National Congress of American Indians for the construction, development, and legislation of the Native American Cultural Center & Museum. In addition, we have received similar Resolutions of support from entities such as the All Indian Pueblo Council of New Mexico among others. The support of the Oklahoma State Legislature is obvious by its passage of legislation creating the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority and providing funds to begin its development.

Oklahoma is the proper forum to tell this story that has affected our Nation as a whole. Since 1994, the Native American Cultural & Educational Authority has made tremendous progress in telling a story in a

way that is truthful and good. The Center is under design and development by a world-class twelve-member design team, including Johnson Fain Partners, Hargreaves Associates, Ralph Appelbaum Associates, LORD Cultural Resources, Harrison Price Company, Hornbeek Larsson Architects, Rick Carter and others.

There is a strong consensus among all those consulted in this effort that the Native American Cultural Center and Museum should be a place that "rewrites" the stories of the past and present in the words of American Indians, and becomes a forum for the shaping of the future. This Center should be a place where all people across the Nation can explore the history of adversity, injustice and survival experience by the tribes. It will be a place where stereotypes can be broken and myths expelled, a place where all people gather to witness a celebration of survival.

The final story can tell of the possibility of hope and prosperity when people of good will come together to build a sense of family in one nation.

I thank you for this opportunity to provide this testimony and express my great appreciation for your consideration of House Resolution 2742. I invite you to join us in meeting this vision to an incredible reality for all people. Thank you.