

## **My Turn**

# **Seeking a fair settlement for Hispano land grants**

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I write in support of the Hispano Land Grants of New Mexico and of the great need to have our millions of acres of land grants returned to our communities once and for all.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, millions of acres of our Spanish and Mexican land grants were stolen from our Hispano Land Grants in central and Northern New Mexico, including several here in Taos County.

Most of our Hispano Land Grants were unfortunately stolen by our own U.S. government and millions of acres of our land grants were unlawfully converted into the U.S. Forest Service (including the Carson National Forest).

These facts are readily available to anyone who cares to read about them and I suggest the book, "Trespassers on Our Own Land," written by attorney Mike Scarborough of Espanola, to read more about the theft of our land grants.

But long before this book was published last year, the fact that the Hispano Land Grants of New Mexico had millions of acres of our ancestral land grants stolen from our people was well-known and a well-established fact.

It is now time for our U.S. government and for our New Mexico Congressional delegation to start helping the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico in regaining our millions of acres of land grants for our communities which have suffered enough through the outright theft of our lands.

Indeed, the theft of our land grants has meant the theft of our economic, social and cultural development and continues to cause considerable hardships and poverty throughout the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico.

The Hispano Land Grants of New Mexico were stolen from our communities in violation of the U.S. Constitution, in which the founders wrote that the government "shall not take lands from the people without compensation." We, the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico have never been paid a dime for the approximately 16 million acres of our land grants that were stolen from us by our government.

In addition, the theft of our Hispano Land Grants occurred in violation of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and in violation of international law, which states “when the sovereignty of a territory changes hands, the people who live in these territories cannot be divested of their lands and possessions without compensation.” The human rights of the Hispano Land Grant communities and families of New Mexico were definitely violated when our land grants were stolen from us.

We, the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico call upon our U.S. Sen. Tom Udall and U.S. Sen.-elect Martin Heinrich and Rep.

Ben Ray Lujan and our state’s Congressional delegation to introduce legislation on our behalf that will result in a fair and historic settlement with all of the Hispano Land Grants of New Mexico that will finally return our millions of acres of land to our Hispano Land Grants and resolve this long and sad chapter in our state’s and nation’s history.

There are currently two bills pending in the Congress to turn 45,000 acres in Taos County into the so-called Columbine-Hondo national wilderness area and the second bill is to turn more than 200,000 acres into the Rio Grande del Norte national conservation area. Many ranchers and private property owners in Northern New Mexico — Anglos and Hispanos — and many of us in the Hispano Land Grant communities cannot support these bills until our Congressional delegation introduces bills to return our millions of acres of land to our Hispano Land Grant communities.

We the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico are citizens, voters and constituents whose concerns and whose struggle to regain our Spanish and Mexican Land Grants matter just as much as the special interests and agendas of the environmentalists and others.

The last time a bill was introduced in Congress to return our millions of acres of land to our Hispano Land Grants was in 1998, when former U.S. Rep. Bill Redmond, a Republican, introduced the Guadalupe Hidalgo Treaty Lands Claim Act of 1998 and by a vote of 223-187, the bill passed the full U.S. House of Representatives, with support from Democrats and Republicans.

Unfortunately, it was not introduced in the Senate where it might have passed and we would now have some resolution. It is time for our U.S. senators and representatives to help the Hispano Land Grant communities of New Mexico in regaining our millions of acres of land grants and introduce new bills on our behalf.

It is now time for our U.S. government and for our New Mexico Congressional delegation to start helping the Hispano Land Grant communities

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