

**Written Testimony of  
Associated Students of Fort Lewis College**

**President**

**Byron Tsabetsaye**

**(Navajo/Zuni)**

**August 22, 2012**

**Before the U.S. Senate Committee**

**On Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions'**

**Field Hearing to**

**Help Fulfill the Federal Mandate to Provide Higher**

**Education Opportunities for Native Americans**

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Testimony of Fort Lewis College by Dr. Dene Thomas  
IN SUPPORT OF S.3504 and S.484, Native American Indian Education Act of 2012  
Before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pension, Field Hearing  
August 22, 2012 .

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, my name is Bryon Tsabetsaye and I am the President of the Associated Students at Fort Lewis College.

When I was a very young boy just beginning to truly grasp the concept of education, I sat at the kitchen table with my father before a piece of paper. The piece of paper contained the lesson of counting money, particularly with coins. I was posed with the task of combining coins so they matched given odd amounts. Though counting change was the lesson, my imagination grasped a far different lesson. I presented to my father, the solution to one of the exercises only to witness the disappointed on his face. Rather than using the traditional coins: pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters, I decided to make my own coins by creating one with the value of two cents. Though I didn't see it then, it was my first exposure to my dreams and reality.

Last November, I had the opportunity to speak at an event called "Toast to Leadership" at Fort Lewis College. The event was created by students to give students a chance to improve on their public speaking skills via experience and evaluation. I was asked to speak at the event on my topic of choice. The topic I chose to speak about was education, specifically my understanding of education.

I grew up in the capital of the Navajo Reservation, a nation inside a nation where people strive to live in widespread poverty and little opportunities. It's not easy to believe that in the year 2012 there are people that live in our country with no electricity and running water. It's not comfortable to know that children have the capacity to dream big but dream with limits due to lack of opportunity and exposure. It's unsettling to witness such

great potential dwindle in high school graduates that don't have the resources to obtain a college education, even after surpassing the level of their parent's education.

I find comfort in knowing that at Fort Lewis College, there is a huge opportunity for Native Americans to achieve a college education. I have no doubt that all Native American students at Fort Lewis College hold their education with a very high value if not priceless. I have great respect for those individuals who fought their limiting beliefs and saw the feasibility of achieving a college education.

My friend, Jessica Stewart, a Navajo student who served as the president of Beta Alpha Psi, an international honors organization for accounting and business majors. Jessica created opportunities for all students on campus organizing trips to businesses and accounting firms. Jessica connected students with achieving their career goals. Jessica also served as a student senator and made a substantial progress holistically at Fort Lewis College. I shared joy with Jessica as she achieved her dream of obtaining a job from one of the top accounting firms in the world. Jessica is just one of many Native American students at Fort Lewis College that is truly making positive difference for students on campus.

When choosing Fort Lewis College, I saw a window of opportunity. It was a window that opened more windows for me in the realm of higher education. My involvement and participation on campus has been dense. I am incredibly grateful for my college education at Fort Lewis College that I am inspired to give back to the college and community. I served as the Vice President of our college's chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success. I created and facilitated success networking teams on campus that allowed students to convene and share their goals. It was an opportunity for students to help one another reach their goals. I give back to our admissions department as a student ambassador. I welcome and help new students lay a foundation for their college years at Fort Lewis College as new student orientation leader.

In a recent jog in the park, I saw a very young boy climbing up a pillar made of uneven rocks and he was nearly at the top. The adult of the boy sat on a bench close to him unwary as she didn't provide any resistance to his ambition. The boy, also unwary, used the pillar as a climbing wall because he saw a challenge without limits.

I will soon begin my senior year at Fort Lewis College. I've never been more eager to begin an academic year. I have been envisioning all my possibilities since I was elected student body president. I stand in confidence not only representing the 138 tribes of Native Americans at my college, but all students of Fort Lewis College. Though I now know there is a difference in dreams and reality, I'm not afraid to dream unrealistically. Without the Native American Tuition Waiver, many possibilities and dreams will be ceased.

Thank you for your time Mr. Chairman and Committee members for the opportunity to appear before you today in support of S.3504 and S.484: I stand ready to answer any questions that you may have for me.