

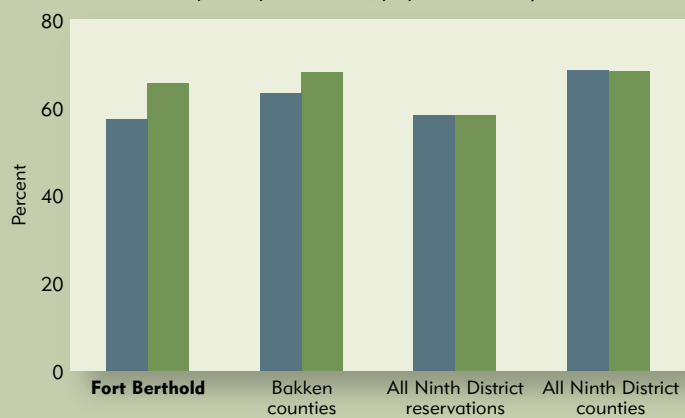
Homeland from page 17

The Bakken effect

The Fort Berthold Indian Reservation has posted big gains on key measures of economic welfare

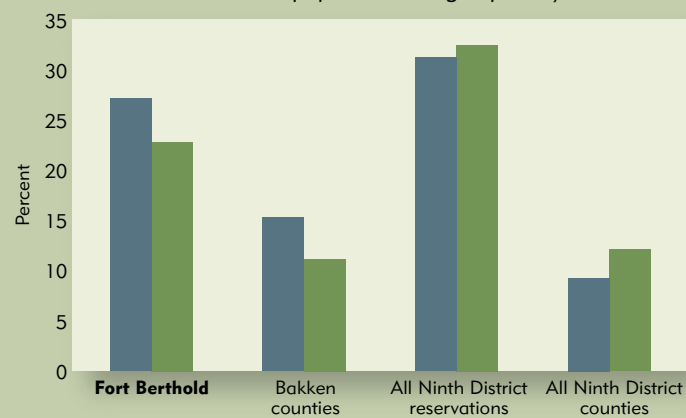
Higher workforce participation ...

Labor force participation rate, population 16 years and older



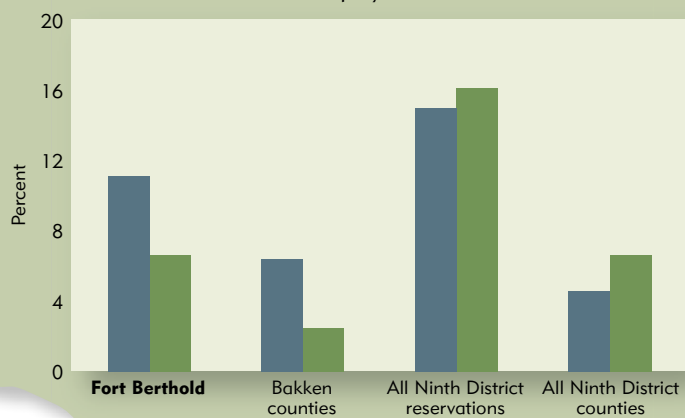
Poverty drops ...

Share of population living in poverty



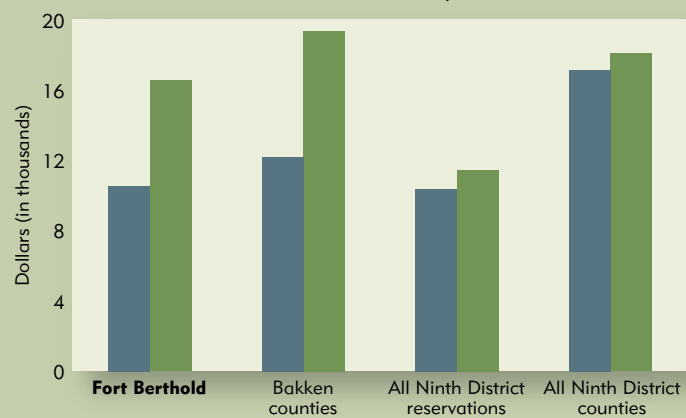
... and lower unemployment

Unemployment rate



... as income rises

Median household income, 2010 dollars



■ Census 2000
■ American Community Survey 2008-12

Bakken counties:
ND: Billings, Burke, Divide, Dunn, Golden Valley, McKenzie, Mountrail, Stark and Williams
MT: Richland, Roosevelt and Sheridan
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

munities, such as Williston and Watford City. But the impact is all the greater on the MHA Nation because it was even less prepared to cope with large-scale industrial development. Before the boom, the tribal administration was small because the BIA and other federal agencies had for decades assumed responsibility for managing tribal land and providing public services such as schooling and road maintenance.

In recent years, the Tribal Business Council, the elected body that sets policy on the reservation, has asserted more authority over government functions and hired more administrative workers—the tribal employee headcount has doubled to about 1,000 since 2010. But some departments still lack the staff and regulatory tools to cope with increased demand for public infrastructure and services.

“Things are growing so fast that the tribal government as a whole and its agencies are doing trial and error, trying to come up with a mode of approach where we can get a handle on things,” said Edmund Baker, director

of the tribes’ environmental division.

For example, a lack of zoning in areas of the reservation beyond New Town’s jurisdiction has contributed to haphazard housing development. In some areas, houses have been built but remain unoccupied because developers are waiting for water or electricity hookups.

In Baker’s department, one person is responsible for monitoring water quality on the entire reservation. And because of scant tribal oversight of pipelines laid by oil and gas firms, environmental workers can only react to spills rather than taking steps to prevent them.

Eye on the future

However, money has the power to cure many ills. The MHA Nation has immense

financial resources with which to minimize the fallout from the oil boom while maximizing its economic potential. How the tribal government spends its oil and gas income is hard to discern; the tribes’ chief financial officer declined to disclose budget details. But it’s clear that the administration is making big investments to address community needs and capitalize on energy development.

Last spring, the tribes reported to the state Legislature \$71 million in spending for ongoing infrastructure development, including \$24 million to reconstruct a key road artery; \$30 million for housing, streets and utilities; and \$6 million for sewer systems.

Providing affordable housing for tribal members is a priority for the Tribal Council. New tribal housing developments include 113 single-family homes in New Town reserved for health care

and law enforcement personnel, and 30 rental units in Mandaree—a significant increase in the housing stock of the town of 600 people. The tribal government charges below-market rent for many of its apartment units and subsidizes home ownership by offering low-interest financing.

The tribes have also spent tens of millions of dollars on health care and education. In July, ground was broken on a new \$14 million K-12 school in the community of White Shield.

And, with an eye to fostering more commercial development on the reservation, the tribal government has taken on the role of real estate developer. In the New Town area, a nonprofit economic development group sanctioned by the Tribal Council is moving to