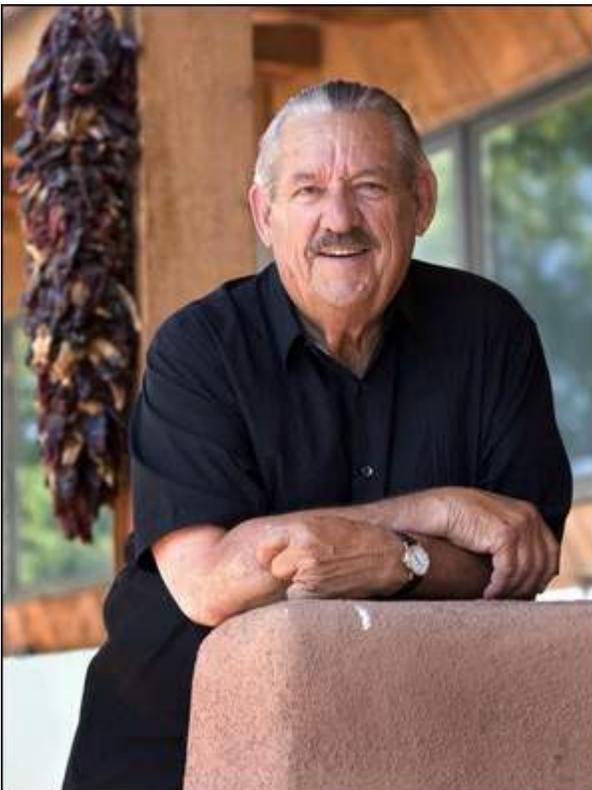




**SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2007**



(Photo by Jake Schoellkopf Associated Press)  
Returning to the scene: Former U.S. Sen. Fred Harris, a Democrat, stands Friday outside his Corrales, N.M., home. Harris will return to Detroit today to hear testimony about any progress or setback since a federal commission released its report on the riot nearly 40 years ago.

## **Almost 40 years after Detroit riot, ex-senator back for follow-up study**

Commission in '68 saw racial divide; today, it's no jobs

Corey Williams  
Associated Press

DETROIT - It was a physically scarred city that U.S. Sen. Fred Harris walked through in early 1968.

Six months removed from one of the most violent race riots in U.S. history, block after block of burned-out buildings, businesses and homes greeted the Oklahoma Democrat.

"It's a cliché, but it looked like bombed-out Berlin after World War II. A lot of these cities did," Harris said of Detroit, Newark, N.J., and other cities that burned in racially sparked violence during the summer of 1967.

"Everywhere there was such a high level of frustration that almost any random spark could set off violence. That's what happened in Detroit and Newark."

Retired from politics, the 77-year-old will return to Detroit today to hear testimony from local leaders and residents about any progress - or setbacks - since a federal commission he helped lead released its report on the riot nearly 40 years ago.

Detroit will be the first in a multiple city tour looking into the legacy of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, popularly called the Kerner Riot Commission.

Its historic conclusion that the country "is moving toward two societies, one black, one white - separate and unequal" helped influence federal policy on race during the 1970s.

Sponsored by the Washington-based nonprofit Eisenhower Foundation, a final report and recommendations from the current hearings are expected to be presented to Congress to form part of a national advocacy platform for policy change.

"The hope is to return to the priorities of the Kerner Commission to significantly reduce poverty, inequality, crime, racial segregation," said foundation President Alan Curtis.

While some of the causes of the Detroit riot, like substandard housing and open animosity between black residents and the police force, largely have disappeared, unemployment and poverty not.

"We talked to people on the street there, young men in particular, and what we heard was: 'We need jobs, baby,' " Harris said.

National labor statistics placed Detroit's unemployment rate at 13.7 percent in 2006.

The national unemployment rate was less than 5 percent last year.

Harris does not consider the commission's original work a failure. He says policies under the Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush administration and the current White House are to blame for things that didn't and aren't getting done.

"Virtually everything we tried did work," he said. "We just quit trying it or we didn't try hard enough."

have