

Fort Berthold Members Locked Out of Community Space for Promoting Clean Energy Alternatives on Reservation

For Immediate Release:
April 3, 2008

Shield.

New Town, North Dakota- Tuesday April 1st marked a particularly nasty turn in the growing controversy over the proposed oil refinery on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation. Tribal leadership locked up the Northern Lights Tribal Community Building when members tried to organize a community presentation there on solar installations and other positive alternatives to dirty energy. The event was planned in conjunction with the Nationwide Fossil Fools Day that was organized to call attention to the adverse health affects associated with the use of Fossil Fuels (www.fossilfools08.org).

On Tuesday morning, Kandi Mossett, the Tribal Campus Climate Challenge Coordinator at the Indigenous Environmental Network, received a call informing her that all the signs for the event that day had been torn down and that the doors were being locked. As a result, she had to move the clean energy forum to the New Town High School cafeteria. Additionally, Kandi was contacted by the Stanley County Sheriffs Department, who were assured that there would be no rioting, but who showed up at the New Town High School anyway asking questions of the school administration who had no idea what was going on. Mossett later found that the ND Division of Homeland Security had been contacted because of the planned event, putting law enforcement in the area on high alert.

In total, over 40 people were in attendance at the presentation, which included information about community health, environmental justice, alternatives to dirty energy, a solar installation presentation, and a drawing for a solar panel. The winner of the solar panel drawing, Mariah Acosta, is a member of the Boys & Girls Club group that has been working with Mossett on the Tribal Campus Climate Challenge Program. The panel was successfully installed by Henry Red Cloud, head of Lakota Solar Enterprises (http://www.treeswaterpeople.org/tribal/tribal_solar.htm), at Mariah's grandmothers home on Wednesday in the Fort Berthold community of White

"It's unfortunate and disheartening that tribal community members like myself that want to present clean energy alternatives are prohibited from doing so by our own leaders. Small scale solar and wind energy projects are feasible alternatives for our people that don't have the adverse health, community, and environmental impacts of dirty energy like oil," said Kandi. "They shut us out of our own tribal community building and they continue to shut us out of a process to challenge the development of a dirty, dangerous oil refinery on our community's land and I just can't understand why, it makes me feel so disempowered and extremely sad. We're supposed to have the right to freedom of speech, a long time ago ALL people had a say in decisions like this. When our current Tribal chairman was running for office in 2006 he said of the proposed refinery, "Let it go to a referendum. Let the people decide." Whatever happened to that? I don't want to cause trouble, I am doing this for the good of all our people, for the good of all future generations. This is coming from a good place in my heart, I truly feel that what I am doing is right."

The proposed oil refinery faces growing community opposition despite the Tribal Councils approval and pressure on dissenters. The Final Environmental Impact Statement of the proposed oil refinery is due for release some time in the next few months. If built, this would be the first new oil refinery built in the United States in decades and will have devastating impacts on the health of the community. The oil would come from the Canadian tar sands, one of the most environmentally and socially destructive oil exploration projects ever undertaken. Tar sands development is happening on Native land in Canada and is widely opposed by First Nations groups and supporters.

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THE PEOPLE SPEAK: Chief doesn't earn respect with tantrum

Muskogee Phoenix
Opinion - April 13, 2008

Cherokee Chief Chad Smith repeated his childish behavior in front of a Oklahoma House Committee just like he did outside the Cherokee Court House during the so-called Cherokee Constitution controversy. This time he was disrespectful and arrogant to the committee chairman during a meeting over a "bill's goal of forcing immigrants to assimilate by speaking English."

His silly behavior didn't make me proud to be Cherokee. He didn't listen to Rep. Randy Terrill, R-Moore, or Chairman Guy Liebmann, R-Oklahoma City, or read the bill, which "carves out exceptions for tribal languages and language programs and will not impact them." He let his ego overrun any common sense.

Shockingly, one day later the House and Senate honored this man for throwing a tantrum. Led by House Speaker Chris Benge, R-Tulsa, who sympathizes with Chad and "understands where he's coming from," he and other elected lawmakers bowed down to apologize. The Oklahoma House and Senate members are teaching our young Cherokees the only way to get your way is to throw a tantrum.

My mother attended Chilocco Indian School as a young girl. She told me English was the only language any child could speak. Any tribal language was prohibited. That was in the 1940s.

Did Chad attend Chilocco during this time? I think not. Is my mother bitter at the U.S. government?

No, she was smart enough to know to get ahead in this world, you have to read, write and understand English.

If Chad would take time away from his "seed money" to visit Cherokee communities like Dry Creek, he would see and meet young Cherokees from full-blood to a quarter, children who speak Cherokee at home and English at school or at work.

Chad is speaking about himself and the Cherokee he is familiar with, the one carrying an "Indian card" with blood less than one-sixteenth, the ones who never spoke or heard Cherokee until he decided to "teach" his Cherokees and save them from being assimilated. The Cherokees who believe it is their right to get housing, medical and other services from the tribe in exchange for a vote for him.

Billy R. McCoy
Tahlequah

Mr McCoy is right..Chad used this tantrum to try to gain more attention to himself as the savior of the Cherokee people..which is a joke unto it's self..Chad doesn't even speak or understand Cherokee..why would he even care about our language..unless he thinks the folks in Washington D.C. are naive enough to believe his ploys..If tribal members are making fun of his ploys then they are also failing to impress his enemies.

mjs

I have a blue card

From: Mollythemare@aol.com

I have my blue card, I have family members that were Freedman's, I also have family members like my Great Grandmother, that did not rise her first two children, and her husband did not list her first two children that were not his on the dawes roll, I am having a problem with Cherokee Nation giving me my CDIB card, I have submitted all the proof but they will not give me my CDIB card.

My question? Who do i need to talk to, To Get this thing moving, Please help

Contact the Freedmen's organization ran by Marilyn Vann..this should prove to the federal government that the CNO is lying to the press when they say they are signing up all Cherokees..I'm sure the feds will listen to you. mjs

continued from page 1 Freedmen are confident following Cherokee appeal

Smith has stated publicly all along that the 2003 elections took place pursuant to the tribe's authority to determine its own membership; freedmen were excluded not for their race, but because they cannot trace their ancestry to century-old citizen rolls.

Smith maintains that Indian tribes should be made up of Indians; and for the Cherokee, the original citizenship rolls are the proof of Indian ancestry. In response, freedmen advocates produce copies of documents that purport to prove Indian blood quantum for persons enrolled as freedmen - a category that did not document blood quantum in the administrative record. Their point is that many freedmen can indeed prove Indian blood. But under the 1866 treaty, they contend they are citizens in any case.

In an interview after the hearing, Velie said, "The court definitely seemed to get our issue. ... This does not rock the foundations of sovereign immunity. ... It's a special situation. You can't foreclose the rights of this group of people. ... This is a unique case."

As threats against the Cherokee multiply in Congress, where a majority of the Congressional Black Caucus has taken up the freedmen cause, Velie said the Cherokee Nation is risking its federal relationship.

Mike Miller, communications director for the Cherokee and an occasional spokesman for Smith, said the tribe is not counting the cost of following its own constitution on citizenship. "There's no point at which any nation says, 'Our constitution doesn't matter.'"

Prominent political figures have joined Smith in urging Congress to refrain from penalizing the Cherokee, at least until courts have sorted out the freedmen issue. A contingent of freedmen at the hearing May 6 - Vera Vann Jones, Waynetta Lawrie, Ron Graham and lead plaintiff Marilyn Vann - said the hearing went well for their case and called on Congress to weigh in against the Cherokee.

"We want Congress to solve it now," Vann said. "It's time for Congress to step in and protect our rights. It's past time."

Black Caucus takes aim at Cherokee funds

TULSA, Okla. (AP) - Some federal lawmakers are urging the U.S. Senate to include a clause in a Native American housing assistance bill denying benefits to the Cherokee Nation unless it recognizes descendants of the tribe's former black slaves, known as freedmen.

But a spokesman for the Tahlequah-based tribe says some lawmakers are "coercing Cherokees" to give rights to non-Indians that Congress took away more than 100 years ago.

The letter, sent last month to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid by members of the Congressional Black Caucus, says the group will "actively oppose" passage of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2007 unless the bill contains the limitation.

"We must send the unequivocal message to the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma that failure to provide full citizenship rights to the Cherokee freedmen will have severe consequences," the letter states. It was signed by nearly three-dozen members of the caucus.

In September, the House passed the bill, H.R. 2786, with a 333-75 vote.

"The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma's push to disenfranchise Cherokee freedmen represents a fundamental injustice that must not go unchecked," said U.S. Rep. Diane Watson, a California Democrat who claims Indian blood and ties to Oklahoma. "The letter we sent ... indicates how resolute we are about this injustice."

At stake is \$300 million in federal money that would go to the Cherokee Nation, the country's second-largest Indian tribe. The money pays for health clinics, Head Start programs, elderly care and housing assistance. If funding were cut off, tribal leaders say more than 6,000 nation employees could lose their jobs, touching off a ripple effect that would economically devastate northeastern Oklahoma.

"I want to continue to stress the point that if the tribe does not want to honor

its treaty obligations, they can forgo the money," said Marilyn Vann, president of the Oklahoma

City-based Descendants of Freedmen of the Five Civilized Tribes. "It's a choice of the Cherokee Nation folks whether they want to spend millions of dollars trying to get around treaty obligations."

Mike Miller, a spokesman for the tribe, said the record clearly shows that more than 100 years ago, Congress took away the rights of any descendants of freedmen born after 1902.

"Congress changed the treaty itself, and the Cherokee Nation has had to live with that change, and dozens of others, for more than a century," Miller said. "Now, more than 100 years later, some members of Congress want to turn back the clock on one specific part of the treaty, a part they had already changed, and change it back."

"Some members of Congress are telling us that if we follow the laws Congress has passed and if we abide by the treaty, then they will cut our funding," he said.

For decades, descendants of freed Cherokee slaves fought to reclaim their citizenship, even though they were adopted into the tribe in 1866 under a treaty with the U.S. government.

A ruling in 2006 by the Cherokee Nation Supreme Court held that the Cherokee constitution assured freedmen descendants of tribal citizenship.

That led to a petition drive for a ballot measure to determine who is a citizen of the nation, which claims 270,000 members.

Last year, nearly 77 percent of Cherokee voters decided in a special election to amend the nation's constitution to remove about 2,800 freedmen descendants and other non-Indians from tribal rolls. The vote said then it was hardly a mandate because only a fraction of the nation's tribal citizens - about 9,000 cast ballots.

Eastern Cherokees--Joe Martin's online paper

<http://cherokeetimesonline.com/Editorial.html>

Bryan Pollard works for Chad Smith..if Pollard had criticized the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma's tribal government, Chad would have fired him, too..I wouldn't put too much stock in Pollard's quote. If Pollard wrote the things that the Cherokee Observer editor's write about his boss and administration he would not last long in Tahlequah and he knows that..we are the only independent paper in the Cherokee Nation and tribal members know that, too..

Pollard's quote "To say that an editor cannot express his opinion and put his name and title to it is antithetical to operating and honoring an independent press," Bryan Pollard, NAJA vice-president and editor of the Cherokee Phoenix (Tahlequah, Okla.), said. "One of the greatest responsibilities of an editor is to state an opinion about matters that affect your community, and to do so thoughtfully and judiciously. Being hired as an editor is not a gag order."

mjs



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SBA certified this company as of 9/20/2005 .
The company's graduation date for the 8(a) program is 9/20/2014 . SBA case
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