

Part one was printed in the Gallup Sun on Friday May 27, 2016. Part one talked about being trapped in a “weird time warp” with periodic round table discussions of Key officials, promises being made, the continuing lack of concrete data on the problem and how to solve the problem. Here is the continuation of that Opinion letter

Personally like a lot of citizens, I am disgusted with the whole issue. I believe these people need to be held accountable for their actions. Ask any counselor who will give an honest opinion on the matter and they will tell you no counseling program will help a person unless that person “really” wants help. If they truly want help there are a host of local options to help these people. To me it’s a matter of the people who need the help getting into these programs and sticking it out.

I also still believe it is better to spend money on education, prevention and counseling of youth and young adults to stop the flow of people into the “pipe line” as opposed to trying to get long time chronic alcoholics reformed.

Here is my take on the problem.

First, when I drive to work every morning I see largely Navajo people on the streets. I believe the Navajo people as a unique people group with unique spiritual and cultural beliefs are the main ones who can solve this problem. Numerous times past and the current Navajo leaders have pressed the need to restore the core principals of “Hozho” and “K’e”. Hozho is the basic concept of maintaining harmony, peace and beauty. Certainly the Navajo people who wander the streets are not in harmony or at peace with themselves, their families, the community they

come from or the people they come in contact with in Gallup. Certainly there is no beauty in this kind of existence. That is where “K’e” comes in. “K’e” essentially is about kinship and maintaining that bond for the good of the whole. That is why I feel the Navajo people with support from their government and other interested parties [the City, the County, non-profits, Churches] have the basic solution.

Second, Navajo culture teaches and most of the people in Gallup I associate with from my chosen Christian faith believe we are to be productive in life and that we have a purpose in life given to us by the Creator. So, I believe these people who wander our streets have “lost their purpose” in life and therefore are not productive in life. The question is: how do we get these people who largely resist counseling to “rediscover” their purpose in life. I have a hard time believing that the Creator brought these people into this world to simply become alcoholics who roam the streets of Gallup. I think we all need to agree the “vision” for these people is not what we see. We need to agree the “vision” for these people is they were created for purpose and to be productive in life. Then we assemble the team of counselors, spiritual leaders and interested parties who can provide services to head them in that direction. We need to stop “enabling” them by feeding and clothing them. We need to practice the “teach them to fish” principle rather than just “giving them the fish” or practice the Habitat principle of “giving a hand up not a hand out”.

Third, I would promote a program like the one in Albuquerque originally suggested by Mayor Berry. The program is called “the Better way program”. In the November 26, 2015 Albuquerque Journal there was a great article on this program entitled: “They would rather work than panhandle”. Essentially, Will Cole drives a van around the streets of Albuquerque and picks up street people who are sober and want to work 4 to 5 hours that day. They are paid minimum wage in cash at the end of the day and fed a meal. Support services are presented to them. The city paid for the van and lines up work projects for them, various non-profits and churches solicit funds to pay the workers and provide the support services. It works.

Just recently I was getting my hair cut when I asked my local barber what he thought the main problem facing the City [County Commission District #3] was – he said the street people. So I asked what he thought the solution was and he said they need to do what they do in Albuquerque. I agree with him. He also wondered why our local leadership hadn’t figured that out. I said maybe they are worried about liability. He said “bull____” if they can figure it out in Albuquerque they should be able to figure it out here.

By Richard Kontz