

When will the BIA be held accountable for tribal refugees?

Written by By Joe Schaller Citizen Watchdog
Friday, 17 June 2016 05:03



The agent for exposure deaths resides with the feds

Gallup's activist media continues to pound the drum, demanding the City of Gallup do something about the dozens of annual exposure deaths, yet we rarely hear of the conditions which bring about these tragedies, let alone the stark scarcity of personal responsibility.

Rather than homeless or vagrant, transients who risk their lives by leaving their homes and traveling long distances to escape the oppression and monotony of the reservation without transportation or a place to stay – all to experience the freedoms of Gallup — should be considered refugees. In order to rectify the problem, the system of rule that has led to the conditions of poverty and lack of freedoms on tribal lands might well be scrutinized by those distressed by the situation – wouldn't you think?

Imagine if the government were responsible for looking after your best interests. All of your assets must be managed by bureaucrats on your behalf. A special bureau is even set up to oversee your affairs. Every important decision you make requires approval, and every approval comes with a mountain of regulations.

In law, a ward is someone placed under the protection of a legal guardian. That lengthy relationship between Native Americans and government continues today. The federal government is responsible for managing Native American affairs for the benefit of all Natives, but they have failed and as a result, Native American reservations are among the poorest communities in the country. But where is the accountability?

Underlying all this is the notion that tribes are not capable of owning or managing their lands.

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The federal government is the legal owner of the land and is required to manage them for the benefit of Native Americans. But because Natives do not generally own their land or homes on tribal land, they cannot mortgage their assets for loans like other Americans.

As a result, it is very difficult to start a business on Native American land. Even valuable natural resources amount to “dead capital.” Capitalizing on those resources is an extremely slow and burdensome process of approval by federal agencies, taking years for energy development on tribal lands in what takes only months on private land. The result is that many investors avoid Native American lands altogether.

Due to federal control, the complicated legal and property systems on reservations are detrimental to economic growth. After a century of the Bureau of Indian Affairs consistently undervaluing Native American resources, things haven't gotten much better economically. As long as tribes are denied the right to control their own resources, they will remain locked in poverty and dependency.

On top of the federally induced poverty, the Navajo Nation does not allow liquor sales on tribal land in the belief that Navajos are incapable of controlling themselves and drinking responsibly.

Tribal impoverishment is a direct consequence of federal policies, which may be why the BIA Public Affairs director in Washington avoids responding to my questions. The flight of reservation refugees to Gallup is clearly brought about by federal and tribal government restrictions of freedom.

Rather than harass the City of Gallup for costly protective custody patrols, detox units, alcohol rehabs, homeless shelters, flophouses, whatever, activists and local media might want to focus their concern and outrage on our local BIA and their \$466-million 2016 budget for the Navajo Region tribal government and “regional oversight.”

Here's an investigative topic for local politicians, activists and media to pursue. How did Gallup become the scapegoat target for the consequences of tribal poverty and oppression of freedoms, while the feds, who are the legal tribal guardians, escape any scrutiny? How did our regional office of the federal BIA become a sacred cow, insulated from any and all accountability? And last of all, what's everybody so darn afraid of – the iron fist of political

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correctness?

“When the people fear their government, there is tyranny; when the government fears the people there is liberty.” – Thomas Jefferson

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