

Representation without Representation

Practically asking, what are the benefits of being a member of an American Indian tribe? What are the requirements for receiving any benefits? These are two basic questions that need to be addressed by elected tribal government officials independent of the federal government regulations/rules/oversight for being eligible to compete for federal discretionary and entitlement funding for most of the tribes in the country. Today, our D7 Kiowa tribal citizens are restricted from receiving federally funded tribal services because they live outside the "tribal service area" yet are included in the count which formulates the basic funding for such funding. It is past time for the Kiowa tribe to adjust this condition with the federal agencies because a majority of Kiowa tribal citizens live outside the tribal service area and are not eligible for most of the tribal services formulated on this outdated regulation/law/ordinance/rule, whatever the right term. Most of the tribe's baby boomers live outside of these out-of-service fences due to past assimilation policies of the federal government, as well as personal choices related to productive career opportunities. To what extent do tribal governments educate their tribal members about the exclusiveness of federal monies and the benefits of being a tribal member? More importantly to what extent have tribal governments established rules/standards for non-federally funding services/other benefits as sovereign nations?

So what could/should be done? All too often our tribal official's response is "nothing if we want the funding" to this simple, yet complex question. Our elected tribal representatives do not represent their tribal citizens (the majority who live outside the "tribal service area" of the tribe) with this attitude, situation, and prevailing conditions. If anything, this federal "tribal service only" regulation is outdated considering that when it was developed most Indian citizens lived within their reservation boundaries as dictated by the federal government. Our tribal representatives must "renegotiate" this regulation/rule. Hopefully, as we move into today and tomorrow our Kiowa elders will witness the time "we are all" eligible for Kiowa tribal services aside from colonial federal regulations/rules from the 1800s.

With all due respect, today's Kiowa constitution does not allow for the expansion of representation and is limited in scope as a result of federal jurisdiction limitations. It caters to the local Kiowa citizens and is simply unfair when it comes to representation, governance, and rights of Kiowa citizens. It was written with little or no vision for the future of governance for the Kiowa citizens and follows an outdated ideology of assimilation and colonialism. The spirit of suppression/oppression exists outright as written. We elders living outside the tribal service region understand and respect the cultural identity of the tribe but, with inflationary conditions, we too need some attention to costs of living assistance, health services, housing/home improvement, and other relevant service opportunities. Just the fact that a significant number of tribal elders outside the tribal service area need transportation to the tribal headquarters to participate in TIC functions and attend tribal cultural ceremonies/activities should be enough for change. To be and stay a part of today's tribal spirit the elders need stronger and better representation within the tribal governance community.

Elders, we all need to read, watch, ask, and listen more to what is going on in tribal affairs and try to be more engaged. It is difficult to connect when you live outside the tribal service area but thankfully we have a good D7 legislator who works hard to inform and keep us in