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BEFORE SEN. BYRON DORGAN; VICE-CHAIR, SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
BISMARCK, ND, STATE CAPITOL, BRYNHILD HAUGLAND ROOM, MAY 2, 2005

Hau mitakuyapi. Hello my relatives. For the record, my name is Auntie Carol Two Eagle, and I am speaking to you today on the subject of the suicide rate of our Indn youth, its causes and methods of relief I believe will decrease this problem significantly. *AUNTIE IS THE PROPER TITLE FOR A FEMALE PIPE CARRIER*

I want to thank you, Senator, for finally beginning to take an active interest in this problem. I & others have spoken out on this matter for decades, but no one in the majority culture took much interest, before the Red Lake nightmare happened. In the Indn Way, we see this lack of interest as racism, so I want to thank you for beginning to correct the situation.

I am a Sun Dancer, and so, a Carrier of a Holy Pipe for our Indn People. My prayer was brought to me by Elders of 7 Nations, who asked me to Sun Dance this prayer. It is called the prayer of The Four Winds. It is a prayer to heal the sacred hoop of the world, so it brings me here before you today.

Since 1993, I have been the head of a 501c3 170c2 chartered as a religious & educational organization. We have been "plugging cracks in the system" since May of 1972 - 33 years this month.

I 'could' keep you here for hours, with my personal knowledge and experiences in dealing with this problem of Indn youth suicide, but I won't. I do make myself available to you for as much more information as you want about the many facets to this problem of American Indn youth suicide, however, as I have dealt with it for many years. My telephone number & email addresses are included here, along with the URL of my weblog site, where I post essays on these kinds of subjects.

I am also a great-grandmother, and in 1998, one of my grandsons suicided. *HE WAS 15,*

There are many reasons given by our youth for suicide attempts. When we distill all the information we have on this problem, the answer is clearly that the problem is caused by ongoing attacks on our Traditional spiritual & cultural ways. These attacks occur in the schools, they occur through the welfare system that too many of our people are forced to live on, & through organizations that claim to be or promote Traditional ways, while selling Holy entities such as Channunpa, commonly called Prayer Pipes.

I have heard it reported that among the emails from the young man who committed the Red Lake nightmare was at least 1 rant about his inability to find anyone who was authentically Traditional, and that he felt as if he had a hole in his soul from lack of access to Traditional spiritual ways. The cause of our Indn youth suicide rate lies there, in an inability of our youth to access our Traditional spiritualities, while they are hounded day & night by the majority culture to drop our Traditional spiritual & cultural Ways.

I have been hounded about this all of my life, beginning with my birth mother, who was ¼ Indn blood. She started stalking me just before my 3rd birthday, attacking me when I slept, & beating me with her fists, "trying to beat the Indn heart out of me", she said. She said she had a bigger problem because, in her words, I "always had a disgusting tendency to go back to the blanket, just like your birth father did". She never would tell me who he was, except that he is an Indn, & DNA tests have proven this to be so.

Needless to say, this woman who birthed me was not mentally or spiritually sound. My elders - my grandmothers & uncles - stepped in & raised me to be a stand-alone pre-missionary Traditional woman; & in so doing, stopped me from becoming another suicide statistic. People who grew up under the conditions I did usually either become violent people or they try suicide in slow motion, through alcoholism or drug use, *OR THEY COMMIT SUICIDE IN THE WAYS THEY DO.*

Because my elders stepped in & raised me in the Traditional spiritual & cultural ways of the D/Lakota people, I have had strong faith, through the Traditional ways, to sustain me through my life - which has included several major crises. It is that strong, solid grounding in our Traditional ways that got me through those crises.

Before the coming of Europeans & their missionaries, we did not have suicide here on Turtle Island, except in unusual circumstances. In our Traditional Way, we believe that when a person suicides with no truly good reason, his or her spirit returns here immediately to live a double life - taking up the old one

where it left off, and living the new life that that person had started during the years s/he walked the earth. Needless to say, such a person has life even tougher the second time than s/he did the first.

The majority culture has tried to destroy that perspective of Traditionalism, just as it tries to destroy all of our perspectives. The majority culture & its missionaries have only ranted about how 'bad' suicide is. After first ranting how 'bad' humans are to begin with, & how much more 'bad' Indns are. This sets up a cultural & personal view that there is no hope. Then the majority culture pounds on us Indns with mascots, mythconceptions and stereotypes about our reliability, our abilities in general, and our honesty. Small wonder that our youth suicide at 40 times the rate for white youth.

I say the rate is '40' times the rate for white youth because the last figures I had stated that black youth suicide at 10 times the rate for white youth, and Indn youth suicide at 4 times the rate for black youth. The correct figure then is '40' times the rate for white youth. And until the Red Lake nightmare happened, the majority culture made no inquiry at all, let alone any move to try to reduce the problem.

So, while the Red Lake nightmare will always be a nightmare, I am not of the 'victim' mentality, Senator; & I see that Jeff May's rampage served a useful purpose, in that it brought you here to hear us & do what you can to help us.

I told you that my birth mother began stalking me just before my 3rd birthday & that thanks to my guardian spirits and my elders, she failed.. My grandmothers & uncles who raised me to be a pre-missionary, stand-alone Traditional woman - did so in secret, since that side of my family is blood-related to 6 of the Dakota warriors who were hanged on the day after Christmas, 1862, in Mankato, MN; & that side of my family went into hiding that day. You have not lived, Senator, until you have tried to sing sacred songs in a whisper, on the premise that "if anyone hears us, the government people come & get us & lock us up or kill us". The story of how my mother tried to deny me my heritage, & my elders worked in secret to make sure I knew it, is legion. Even if my birth mother had not stalked me, it has been common throughout Indn world to hide our ceremonies from non-Indns, from common view, & in so doing, from our youth. This has contributed majorly to the suicide rate of our youth.

When I began to speak openly about Traditional spirituality, many elderlies & some younger men came to me & begged me not to, on the premise that, "Either the government people will come & get us & lock us up or kill us" or "The government people will kill you! There is still a Program to kill off our Women of Power!" That was in the early 1990's.

"Women of Power" is a term that refers to spiritually-gifted women such as I am. Before there was a U.S. government, European missionaries who came to our shores targeted our Women of Power, killed them, beheaded them, put their heads on poles, & traveled up & down the East coast, "to send a message to the Indigenous People". We got the message, Senator, & our Women of Power went into hiding, & across Turtle Island, Indns began to lie about the existence of such women. We told the missionaries that women had no spiritual power. We changed our cultures on the surface to protect our spiritually-gifted women - & eventually, the lie became known as the truth throughout our cultures, as the attacks of the missionaries - mainly through the boarding schools - caused our youth to be neither wolf nor dog - not part of the majority culture & unable to function in our Traditional cultures, either, because they didn't know their cultural & spiritual Traditions.

There are many books that detail this activity, Senator - If you wish a list, I will get it to you.

For most of the past 200+ years, since a United States government came to be, there have been in place many programs to: destroy our Traditional spiritual ways; destroy our Traditional cultural ways; destroy our languages. Reservations, boarding schools, and 'correctional schools' are high on the list.

Within just the last 12 months, people came to me for help in dealing with a white teacher on one of our Reservations who made a lot of noise complaining about "filthy heathen practices" when our people smudged in the school each day.

I told them to tell that teacher that she is working in one of our countries; that we are Sovereign Nations; & she is to keep her opinions to herself & stop attacking our Traditional Ways if she wants to keep her job. I told them that if they preferred, I would tell her. That seemed to give them the courage of their convictions, & they told her themselves, & the problem ended. This is not an uncommon occurrence.

When any of our teachers have done this off the Reservations, bigots have claimed we are violating the Doctrine of Separation of Church & State - & then gone ahead with their Christian prayers & such.

Since I have begun going to the ND Legislative Sessions & testifying as a citizen lobbyist, I have been told the following: Our Lt. Governor 'could not' show respect & call me by my proper title, 'because that would be ancestor worship', but he could easily call a Catholic priest 'Father' or an abbess 'Mother Superior'. Another Legislator snarled at me in public, "You don't have a real religion!" when I was requesting an amendment to an anti-tobacco bill so that our Indn youth would not be in violation when they smoked during ceremony, since smoking tobacco is central to our Traditional spiritual practices. This Legislator has since learned a better perspective, I'm happy to say. But it took awhile.. I have been asked "Why Indns seem to have so much trouble assimilating into the majority culture, & didn't I think that if they dropped this Traditional spiritual stuff, they'd progress faster?" My answer to that was, "I Carry a Holy Pipe, & you ask me a question like that?!" First, assimilation into the majority culture is a giant step backward, not forward. Second, our Traditions have taught us how to live in a good way for thousands of years. We have only had trouble since your people came here & began trying to force us to drop our ancient ways." There are more examples, but you get the idea. If you want further specifics later, let me know. "I don't see anything racist about the remark (by a ND employer) that all Indns are fat, lazy, & sloppy" (a state worker in the Labor Department); "I don't see what the big thing is with you Indns about mascots - I think they're cute." By no means are these all of the examples.

Senator, the Oxford Standard Dictionary of the English Language defines a mascot as "a pet". Do I strike you as someone who would make a good pet? Does any human? It further defines a mascot as a kind of slave. Last I heard, slavery was outlawed in 1862, with the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Outlawing mascots by majority culture entities would go a long way toward decreasing our Indn youth suicide rate. We & our cultures are not quaint, cute, collectible museum pieces. We are living, breathing people; & our cultures are still vibrant & beautiful, even after all these years & attacks.

These attacks on our Ways, with accompanying devastation to our People, began when missionaries & traders began to come here in the 1500's, & brought us 2 things we didn't have before: alcohol & religious division. The original Four Point Plan was devised by Fr. Paul LeJeune, a Jesuit missionary, according to orders sent to him according to a Papal Bull from Pope Gregory XIII. These four points are still in use today - & they are the root reason for suicides by our Indn youth, then & now.

Paul LeJeune's four points for destroying Indigenous Traditional spiritual ways were: (1) Separate the children from their mothers & especially from their grandmothers at an early age; about 5 - 6, because that is where they learn their basic languages, world views, & behavioral norms. (2) Do not allow them to wear their Traditional clothes or hair styles, or speak their mother tongues, since languages are the way cultures & the thought patterns & world views of those cultures are expressed. (3) Forbid them to worship in their Traditional ways. (4) Teach both the men & the boys that women are not spiritually equal, let alone superior. Teach them to beat their wives to teach them humility & subservience to males.

Boarding schools operated precisely according to these 4 points. Males had such atrocities visited on them as: stitching their foreskins closed for up to a week for 'being caught' worshipping in the Traditional ways; tying a string tightly around the boys' penises if they were caught with an erection or trying to be with a girl; being dressed in women's clothes for running away; to name a few. Females were forced to spend long periods of time on their knees on hard surfaces, sometimes while holding a load or carrying one; were called obnoxious names like slut, for showing an interest in boys; were dressed in males' clothes & made to do males' work & derided for it; to name a few. Both males & females were whipped. These practices continued into the 1950's for sure, & instances were reported into the 1960's. I was expelled, for being "incorrigibly heathen". But individuals like me are few & far between.

In 1994, I was held in South Dakota's state hospital for 3 weeks, & had a full Board hearing, for being Traditional. Among the charges the prosecutor made were: "She talks to God, & believes He answers!" To which I replied, "Of course! What do you think - there's a spiritual bulletin board & we hang post-it notes on it!?" He also claimed that "She prays anywhere & everywhere!" Also true. The Chair of the Board 'caught' me praying during that hearing & asked, "Here?!" To which I replied, "What better place?"

My life is hanging in the balance, here." Another charge was that I believe that the Universe is a living being - which is absolutely true; I do. As do all other authentic Traditional people.

In our Lakota Traditional spiritual ways, our Creation belief is that time began when Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, decided It wanted to know about Itself in all of Its infinite variety, & It began to give its parts solid form. Of course this process is continuing; or there would be no universe at all. And our phrase, "mitakuye oiasin", which means, "All, (are) my relatives" reflects that reality belief. We are all parts of Wakan Tanka & that is how we are related.

The physical world proof of spirit is air. We can't see it, we can't hold a specific piece of it in our hands, but we can't & don't live without it. Nothing does. If spirit weren't more powerful than physical, we would not only have no reason to pray, we would not know about prayer.

In getting the word out to the Indn community about this hearing today, I made fliers, & took them around Bismarck for posting, on Friday. I got far too many refusals from businesses that we Indns usually patronize a lot. Among the "reasons" I got for refusals to post the fliers were: (1) We only post on the first & 15th of each month. (Cashwise). (2) If we post for you, we'll have to do it for everyone. (A Buck or So, Dan's Supermarket on 3rd Street, Big Lots, Wal-Mart, to name just some). This argument is as ridiculous as it is insulting. This is hardly about yard sales or some such! And these same people cry loud & long about their people's death rates, about the attacks of September 11, 2001; and similar. This is racism, pure & simple. (3) We only post community events that are entertaining. Apparently, suicide prevention, especially among Indns isn't 'entertaining' enough. But my favorite 'reason' for refusing to post a notice was, "Um, we generally limit our postings to craft events." That was the manager of Hancock Fabrics, where our Indn women buy a lot of fabric for making Lakota Star blankets, which are an important cultural entity, & are part of our Traditional spiritual ways.

I told her that the suicide rate of our Indn youth is certainly a lot more important than any craft event! I also pointed out that she was refusing to *show* respect for the many Indn women who buy fabric at Hancock Fabrics, and for their children and grandchildren. She still refused to put up the flyer, so today, I bring her to your attention, & that of everyone who is here, as well as posting her & the others' comments on my weblog site, www.DiscoverNDNow.com, where the world can read about such racist views. I also reminded her to be sure to go to church on Sunday, so people could see her there. Then I left.

In short, Senator, a strongly-encouraged return, whole-heartedly supported by strong government programs, including funding, to our Traditional spiritual & cultural ways will stop this epidemic of suicide among our Indn youth. (1) Making sure that our languages are taught to every Indn child in every Reservation school, and made available through special programs to all those Indn children who are living off their Reservations is critical. (2) Making sure that our sweat lodges are insured proper treatment & shown proper respect wherever they are, such as at our ND Youth Correctional Center outside of Mandan, where I currently have quite an argument going on, trying to get those kids & that particular sweat lodge to be *shown* proper respect - & every place where Indns are incarcerated in any form or to any degree, nationwide. (3) Making sure that our Traditional spiritual people are accorded the same treatment as is given to Christian ministers, including per diem honoraria when we lead ceremonies for our people who are behind the Iron Doors. (4) Encouraging, promoting, & supporting Traditional spiritual practices with the same fervor that is shown to Christian activities, rather than supposedly "preaching tolerance" of our Ways. This is about *showing* respect; not merely paying lip service to our Traditional ways.

In the majority culture, there is a section in the Constitution about the Doctrine of Separation of Church & State. In our Indn Ways, we don't believe our spirituality can be separated from any aspect of our lives.

We have been, & still are, harassed & even persecuted for practicing our Traditional spiritual Ways - called heathens, pagans, & devil-worshippers by ignorant members of the majority culture, & those who have been hornsogged into walking the Jesus road instead of the Red Road. I have first-person knowledge of police & deputies both, show up at ceremonies, & "demand" to know "what you people are up to here"; or "what you people think you're doing, here", & similar.

I can't tell you how many times I've been asked what we smoke in the Holy Pipe; or asked about "your peoples' drug uses" relative to our Channunpa.

We find these kinds of questions incredibly rude & insulting. I have been threatened with police action for: praying by the side of a road; for doing ceremony in someone's house; to name just a couple of such instances - & so have most of us who Keep Holy Pipes (Channunpa).

To travel by air with a Channunpa is impossible for us who are authentically Traditional, because of the various taboos about women who are on their moons not being allowed near such a Holy entity; & taboos about people who have used alcohol or drugs handling a Pipe; & taboos about merely curious people handling such holy entities as Channunpa "to see what It is", & so on.

There are businesses & organizations that sell Channunpa - which is absolutely forbidden by our Traditional Ways. It is my belief that when such businesses are allowed to operate, & to advertise that the people who sell through them are "real Traditional people", they *cause* suicides among our Indn youth. Disallowing such flagrant lies by such businesses/organizations, by law, would go a long way toward decreasing the suicide rate among our Indn youth.

In short, strong promotion of return to Traditional spiritual & cultural ways would massively decrease the suicide rate of our Indn young people. Traditionally, we value work, personal generosity, honor, & strength of character. Programs that enable Indn people to get training to get culturally-appropriate jobs or start culturally-appropriate businesses would be of great value. Changing the way our Indn children are schooled, from Head Start through high school, so that they learn their languages, cultural ways, & Traditional spiritual ways would also help greatly.

Getting rid of any government bias against our Traditional Ways, including in the Bureau of Indian Affairs & in the way the BIA handles any of our 'trust' concerns, would also help greatly. Freeing Leonard Peltier from prison for a crime he didn't commit would go a long way toward encouraging Indn youth, which would decrease the suicide rate among them. Outlawing use of Indns & Indn terms as mascots would be helpful, as well; not necessarily by law, but certainly by policy & practice.

Spiritually aimless people commit suicide, Senator. Suicide is a scream from someone who wants to be shown respect - for his or her spiritual & cultural perspectives & practices. Not treated like some kind of anachronism, cultural oddity or collectible - as if s/he were not real or valuable. In the long run, what this is all about is *showing* respect for our Traditional Indn ways - not merely claiming it via lip service, while the actions speak so much more loudly against the words.

Thank you for hearing me in a good way now. Many blessings on you. Mitakuye oiasin. (All {are} my relatives.)

Auntie Carol Two Eagle