

To consultation@bia.gov

From: Barbara Basketfield

Re: Tribal Consultation on Federal Infrastructure Projects

November 29, 2016

At the request of a close friend, I attended the Tribal Consultation session held in Rapid City on Thursday November 17, 2016. I am a student at Oglala Lakota College majoring in Lakota Studies. I will earn my Associates in Spring 2017 and my Bachelor's in Spring 2018. I am not a member of a federal recognized tribe. I have traveled to Pine Ridge Indian Reservation for the past 20 years and moved to Rapid City 5 years ago. I have studied Lakota Language on Standing Rock Indian Reservation. I have learned many things. One Oglala elder has felt comfortable enough with my understanding of Lakota thinking to advise me, "You have a voice. You should use it to explain the Lakota people to your people." It is with his permission I volunteer the following.

1. During the course of the session, I heard several times "There is no uniform process in consulting with Indian tribes." Mainstream culture and the federal government exhaust themselves trying "uniform" as many things as possible into sameness. The Lakota people do not think this way and I assume that holds true for other tribes as well. They resist most attempts to categorize them into similar groups. The more the federal government tries to follow a "uniform" process, the more they will resist. The most likely result of forced uniformity would be non-participation.
2. Meaningful consultation would include many tribal members, not just the Tribal Chairman or Tribal Council members. Sometime the most respected and influential members are only known within the community. The tribal chairman in some cases may not even be respected. In order to have meaningful consultation with a particular tribe, it is imperative that these members be included in the conversation. Discovering who they are may be different in each tribe.
3. What is consent? I offer this story told to me by that same Lakota elder. He explained, in the past, when a conflict existed, all interested and affected tribal members would meet. They would discuss the situation, talk about possible solutions and compromises. This process could take hours, days or weeks or months and continued until consensus was reached - consensus, not 'majority rules,' as is used in the mainstream culture to solve conflict. If consensus could not be reached, then the issue was left as is. The thinking is, we already talked about it, we couldn't find consensus, there is no solution. So, there is no point in talking about it again. Although not necessarily apparent, much of this thinking still prevails.

These are the main points upon which I would like to comment. Maybe you know all these things already, but I think not. The frustration I heard from tribal members that day was the result of hundreds of years of non-meaningful communication. It seems based on an imbalance of respect. All minority group members have had to learn the thinking of mainstream culture, merely to survive. Although some members of mainstream culture have tried to communicate or think they understand other cultures, in many cases they do not. When that happens, Lakota people do not necessarily engage. They usually step away. No solution to be found.

I was born and raised in the mainstream culture and after 20 years with the Lakota people, it is clear to me, the thinking, beliefs and ways of being are deeply different. To achieve meaningful consultation will take a lot of work, patience and not much uniformity of thinking.

Thank you for listening,

Barbara Basketfield
2012 Elm Ave
Rapid City, SD 57701

708 601 1751
bbasketfield@att.net