

Letter to the Editor: A spirited journey

Written by Gallupsun Staff
Friday, 25 March 2016 03:54



Editor,

When the Longest Walk 5--"Declaring War on Drugs" arrived in Gallup (NM) on March 17 and 18, 2016, I didn't know how many people knew what was taking place, although, even as this historic event has come and gone, the war continues here as it does in every community along their way to Washington, D.C. which began on the Barona Band of Mission Indians Reservation in San Diego County, southern California on a 3.500 mile spiritual journey.

Here in Gallup, the drug of choice is everything under the sun but alcohol seems to get the most attention and this is reflected in the costs of operating a detox center that is the proverbial (regional) money pit, quite literally. A slush fund called the "Liquor Excise Tax" can't explain the most recent (but now expired) talk of a possible closure due to a lack of funding.

The Longest Walk 5 (LW5) was also in response to this last year that President Barack Obama has in office. He can grant clemency to political prisoner Leonard Peltier and the world-wide call for this will get louder as LW5 nears Washington, D.C. in July 2016. At present, there is no evidence that links Peltier to the crimes he has served 41 years for. I join that call for his release and restoration.

Locally, it was also a Memorial for Larry Casuse and those who have fallen because of the city's close relationship with the Liquor Industry and the sky-high number (39+) of liquor licenses that are illegal considering NMSA 1978 60-6A-18, "Limitations on number of licenses, exceptions (1991)".

When the first Longest Walk took place in 1978 it was in response to 11 Congressional Bills that

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would have changed the course of America's history in the ongoing "Indian Wars" taking place across the nation with "Native American" land and water rights and treaties under constant threat by governments and (multi-national) corporations.

Every community the LW5 passes through has their stories about the horrors of their front line battles. LW5 Walkers (Co-Founder of the American Indian Movement) Dennis Banks, Yolanda Begay, Clifford Jack and Orlando Vigil also shared their stories on local radio station KNIZ 90.1 FM on March 17th.

At a public forum held on March 18th at the Gallup Community Service Center, Dine' (Navajo) brothers Lenny and Larry Foster were in attendance, who, along with Banks, were present at "Wounded Knee Liberation Day" in 1973--the 71-day siege by U.S. federal Marshalls and military who were packing heavy artillery. Lenny emphasized the traditional and cultural aspect of LW5 noting it was a ceremony, songs, prayers, a White Owl and a pack of stray feral dogs that aided their daring escape as he took point and led others out on that dark night of opportunity.

Gallup Mayor Jackie McKinney was also in attendance and acknowledged the treaties broken by the federal government and the fact that Gallup has a public health crisis on its hands and that "it has grown to the point of it's an epidemic...we have people dying in the streets of Gallup."

LW5 has left town with the blessing of Gallup via an official city proclamation declaring March 18th "Longest Walk 5 Day" but it has also left us with a message: It is not only about drugs or alcohol; other aspects of this war include the loss of our Indigenous culture, language and history, the astronomical loss of lives, domestic violence, official willful government neglect along with the deliberate and continual blame game and shirking of responsibility, much like a hard-core alcoholic living in denial on the streets of "Drunk Town, U.S.A."

Ironically, with the number of exposure deaths at eight (8) in 2016 (to date) the LET has been present in every alcoholic demise; hopefully that does not top last year's body count of 21. This taxation has a specific group of citizens it represents.

Mervyn Tilden

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