

Alcohol Problems Facing Native Americans

Senate Statement
by Sen. Larry Pressler (R) SD

Sen. Pressler made an overwhelming statement to the Senate on May 20, 1993, regarding the effects and use of alcohol among Native Americans. Compared with the population as a whole, said Sen. Pressler, **"Indians suffer from over five times the rate of alcohol-related accidental deaths, double the rate of alcohol-related homicidal deaths, nearly double the rate of suicides and up to 20 times the rate of fetal alcohol syndrome."** Alcohol abuse is a major factor in 5 of the 10 leading causes of death among Indians. The rate of alcoholism is 5.5 times higher among Indians than the general population. It is estimated that nearly 20 percent of all Indians have an alcohol-related problem. Alcohol is a factor in 75 to 80 percent of all Indian suicides and 90 percent of all homicides."

Sen. Pressler indicated that American Indians tend to begin abusing alcohol and other substances at a younger age than individuals of other races and that white youth begin to drink less alcohol at about age 22. **"This is not happening with the Indian population"** he stated.

According to a recent study conducted at Fort Collins, Colorado, one of the primary reasons Indians drink is **boredom**. The study also identified a link between an Indian's income and the amount of alcohol consumed. Specifically, the Fort Collins study revealed that alcohol consumption was reduced by some 0.297 liters for every additional \$1,000 of income. This is an indication of the need to **improve the economic and general living conditions of Indians.**

Sen. Pressler said "In 1992, alcohol abuse in the United States cost Americans an estimated \$100 billion in additional insurance premiums, medical costs, accident costs, lost wages, and other injuries. The Department of Veterans Affairs and the Indian Health Service spend hundreds of million of dollars on alcohol treatment programs. Ironically, individuals enrolled in the IHS and VA programs suffer a **higher relapse rate of 30 percent**, while, those seeking help from other programs experience a relapse rate of about **21 percent.**"

Sen. Pressler is not suggesting that the IHS or VA alcohol treatment programs are ineffective or that they are not needed. Nor is he suggesting that every insurance plan cover all alcohol treatment programs. He indicated that treatment **options** should be coupled with **economic development on reservations**, more activities for Indian youth, better treatment for the medical consequences of alcohol abuse, **community-based education programs on alcohol abuse, and more alcohol treatment programs at the community level.**

Sen Pressler spoke of his conversation with Dr. Enoch Gordis, Director, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism who indicated that recent scientific findings seem to reveal that **genetics** play a **significant role** in chemical dependency. **Environment** and other **social conditions** are major factors as well. However, genetic engineering, in time, may make it possible to prevent or treat genetic disorders which cannot be done now. We can, however, control environmental, educational and social factors that contribute to alcoholism and these are the elements we must focus on in reducing alcohol abuse.

An Indian generally will seek alcohol treatment at an IHS facility. It is Sen. Pressler's feeling that there should be more **community-based** treatment programs as **Alcoholics Anonymous, Rational Recovery, and Red Road to Recovery.** These programs are operated by volunteers and reduces costs allowing the individual to remain with family and friends during treatment.

Alcohol Anonymous, is a fellowship of men and women who have had a drinking problem. They share their experiences, strengths, and hopes. They attempt to help each other conquer drinking problems. This method of treatment relies on 12 basic principles. Belief in a higher power is central to this approach.

Rational Recovery is similar to AA. However, this approach to recovery rejects the need for a higher power to conquer a drinking problem. It relies on inner strength and the support of other people.

Sen. Pressler indicated that "In my state of South Dakota, many tribes are using a new treatment called **Red Road to Recovery**. **In this program, an individual goes into a sweat lodge to pray and turn thoughts inward. This is a spiritual experience, and it relies on belief in a higher power to conquer the drinking problem.**"

Should you want copies of Sen. Pressler's entire Senate statement and the interview with Dr. Enoch Gordis, Director of the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and the leading expert on the problems of alcohol abuse you may obtain them by contacting either Senator Pressler's office in Washington, D. C., (202) 224-5842 or the National Indian Health Board in Denver, Colorado.



50 Years Together

Congratulations to Delores & Edward Rilatos 1 who celebrated their 50th Wedding Anniversary on December 29 . A celebration was held by their children, Gloria, Elaine, Dan ,and Edward II in Wrangell, Alaska in honor of the occasion.



SPECIAL WISHES to a special couple! Congratulations to Delores & Edward Rilatos on their 50th wedding anniversary.

Clarice, Frankie, Rick,
Davie, Phil, Kent & Darin



What I Like About the Tribe.....

By: Mike Elwood

Recently I attended the General Council meeting in Siletz. This was my first one and I came away with several impressions. There was a good turnout and it was obvious that there was strong interest in the operations and the direction the Tribe was going. There was allowance and toleration for strong debate. This is not only a testament to the deep concern and articulateness of the membership, it also bears out the maturity and forbearance of the leadership. Several individuals asked pointed questions regarding STEDCO, gaming, etc., and when it appeared the discussion threatened to become divisive, a voice was heard urging support of both parties. It is a delicate balance to be hard on substance but easy on people. I was continually surprised and pleased that at the critical point the membership seemed to grasp the issues and would introduce a motion to resolve the conflict.

The most solemn moment for me revolved around the issue of the proposed removal of several Tribal members from the roll. Carlotta Edenfield started the discussion with an impassioned plea to stop the proceedings of removal. Fully a third of the 150-200 or so people in attendance went to the podium with her and gave their feelings on the issue so close to their heart. Several Elders, including Pauline Ricks, Agnes Pilgrim and others appealed for unity and reason in dealing with the controversial issue of the proposed removal. One highlight for me was Ed Ben's account of the drafting of the constitution and his appeal to the "Indian way". It was clear that, to those involved, being a Siletz Indian was something more than a name on a roll. It was who they are as people. It would have been easy for the group present to be carried away

by this emotional subject. However, several people recognized that the core issues of constitutional interpretation, accountability of program services, and equity still remained. The meeting pressed on until a positive direction was decided, not just to relieve the present situation but resolve the issue once and for all.

It then appeared to me that this concern

that threatens the very fabric of the Tribe could lead to a new level of cohesiveness that is so badly needed right now. Economic shortfalls contributed to by the gaming effort, the Bureau, or the timber crisis can divert attention inward when the real battle is outside. On every hand Tribal members are fighting for their lives over the residual effects of termination, oppression and a culture that has yet to value cultural diversity. What is needed is a rallying point. I saw the beginnings of one forming with the dialogue on what makes a Siletz Indian different and special. It is my hope that the Tribe will continue to build on this foundation, not as an effort to pretend nothing needs fixing or that adjustments aren't necessary but to make sure that cooperation and support are ensured as thorny problems are dealt with. This Tribe has something that no other group of people has. Many values are held in common with other Tribes but no other group has the history, experiences, tradition and identity that the Siletz has. This is worth holding on to. This is worth fighting for. As the Tribal Constitution puts so well, "(the Government is established to)...Continue forever, with the help of God, our unique identity as Indians and as the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians of Oregon, and to protect that identity from forces that threaten to diminish it..."