

The Policy of Donald Trump towards Native Americans

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*"It makes my heart sick when I remember all the good words and the broken promises." - Chief Joseph (1840-1904),
Niimípu Tribe (Nez Perce)*

Abstract

Many questions have arisen about Donald Trump during the campaign concerning his platform, his knowledge of issues, his inflammatory language and his level of comfort with political violence. Though Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, Trump's unexpected victory is shocking for the people of color, women, immigrants and disabled individuals - the people he frequently refers to in a derogatory way.

Particularly interesting is President Trump's attitude towards Native Americans. Native communities across the U.S. have experienced hundreds of years of colonization and it is quite alarming for them to see a man who has historically disrespected and attacked indigenous people throughout his campaign in 2016.

The article aims to elaborate the current attitude of Donald Trump towards Native Americans, particularly, the study reviews present policies of President Trump in relation with American Indians. It is important to understand how he might go about making decisions in office concerning indigenous peoples of the U.S.

Keywords: Donald Trump, Native Americans, pipeline, policy

Introduction

Generally, the policy of Barack Obama administration towards Native American issues is assessed positively by the American Indians. He won accolades among the indigenous people for breaking through a gridlock of inaction on tribal issues and for putting a spotlight on their concerns with yearly meetings with tribal leaders.

During his tenure, Barack Obama cemented a tribal health care law that includes more preventive care and mental health resources and addresses recruiting and retaining physicians throughout Indian Country.

According to the journalist Mary Hudetz, the Interior Department restored tribal homelands by placing more than 500,000 acres under tribes' control - more than any other recent administration - while the Justice Department charted a process approved by Congress for tribes to prosecute and sentence more cases involving non-Native Americans who assault Native American women. Before Obama, a gap in the laws allowed for such crimes to go unpunished (Hudetz, 2016).

Furthermore, it is stated that the U.S. federal government settled decades-old lawsuits involving Native Americans, including class-action cases over the government's mismanagement of royalties for oil, gas, timber and grazing

leases and its discrimination against tribal members seeking farm loans.

According to Brian Cladoosby, chairman of the Swinomish Tribe north of Seattle and president of the nonpartisan National Congress of American Indians, based in Washington, D.C., President Obama has been the greatest president in dealing with Native Americans, "the last eight years give us hope going forward with the relationships we have on both sides of the aisle" (Hudetz, 2016, p. 2).

Meanwhile, a newly elected U.S. President Donald Trump rarely acknowledged Native Americans during his campaign and hasn't publicly outlined how he would improve or manage the United States' longstanding relationships with Native nations.

His Interior secretary pick, Republican Ryan Zinke of Montana, sponsored legislation that he says would have given tribes more control over coal and other fossil fuel development on their lands. But some of Trump's biggest campaign pledges - including repealing health care legislation and building a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border - would collide with tribal interests.

In Arizona, Tohono O'odham Nation leaders decided to oppose any plans for a wall along the 75-mile portion of

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the border that runs parallel to their reservation. And the non-profit National Indian Health Board in Washington says it's aiming to work with lawmakers to ensure the Indian Health Care Improvement Act remains intact (Hudetz, 2016).

The law, which guarantees funding for care through the federal Indian Health Services agency, was embedded in Obama's health care overhaul after consultations with tribes.

The government's role figures prominently in Native Americans' daily lives because treaties and other agreements often require the U.S. to manage tribal health care, law enforcement and education. Some Native American tribes are unsure how President Trump can understand and care about their unique relationship with the federal government. According to Duane Chili Yazzie, president of the Navajo Nation's Shiprock Chapter, people in Indian Country had a great hope with the direct dialogue that former president Barack Obama established with tribal nations, "if a similar effort to communicate with us were carried on by the Trump administration, I would be surprised" (Hudetz, 2016, p. 3).

Representatives of Indian Country were suspicious about Trump's relations with Native Americans. They hoped the businessman could turn around lagging economies in rural reservations, such as the 27, 000-square-mile Navajo Nation, which covers parts of Utah, New Mexico and Arizona.

As Deswood Tome, a former spokesman for the tribe from Window Rock, Arizona noted, Trump supports the job growth and tribes need a healthy dose of business creation; in order to accomplish this, it is necessary to remove a lot of federal barriers, "we're the only ethnic group who have so much federal control in our lives"(Hudetz, 2016, p. 3).

Case of the Dakota Access Pipeline

The Dakota Access pipeline represents another crucial difference of interests between Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Since April of 2016, representatives of 200 Native American tribes and environmentalists have been camping out in North Dakota to protest against a pipeline, according to them the planned pipeline near the tribal land runs through a sacred burial ground and could leak polluting nearby rivers and poisoning the tribe's water sources. "The 1,100 mile (1,770 km), \$3.7 billion Dakota Access pipeline would carry oil from just north of the tribe's land in North Dakota to Illinois, where it would hook up to an existing pipeline and route crude directly to refineries in the U.S. Gulf Coast" (Cullen & Reuters, 2016, p. 2). The police has used sound and water cannons, pepper spray, taser gun and shotguns against the protesters.

On September 6, 2016, protesters stood on heavy machinery after halting work in Energy Transfer Partners Dakota Access oil pipeline near the Standing Rock Sioux reservation near Cannon Ball, North Dakota. As David

Archambault, tribal chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux stated, "our indigenous people have been warning for 500 years that the destruction of Mother Earth is going to come back and it's going to harm us, now our voices are getting louder" (Cullen & Reuters, 2016, p. 3).

Herein, it is important to provide a brief information about the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, which is one out of six reservations in Dakotas that are all that remain of what was once the Great Sioux Reservation, which comprised all of South Dakota west of the Missouri River, including the Black Hills, which are considered sacred, according to the tribe's website.

The tribe has 15,000 members in the United States including as many as 8,000 in North and South Dakota. The reservation covers about 9,300 square miles (24,087 square km) (Cullen & Reuters, 2016).

The pipeline dispute led Obama's administration to begin tackling a final piece of its Indian Country agenda: guidelines for how cabinet departments should consult with tribes on major infrastructure projects. Members of the Standing Rock Sioux were complaining that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers failed to properly consult with them before initially approving a pipeline route that ran beneath Lake Oahe, the tribe's primary source of drinking water (Hudetz, 2016).

During Barack Obama's tenure in office, in September of 2016, his administration held seven meetings with tribal leaders and began drafting a report on how federal officials could consult with tribes; the administration planned to complete the report before Obama's leave, even though an incoming administration intended to undo some of the president's policies.

On January of 2017, a newly-elected President Trump signed an executive order instructing the army corps of engineers to "review and approve in an expedited manner" (Milman, 2017, p. 1) the Dakota Access project, an 1,100-mile pipeline that would take oil from the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota to Illinois. According to this decision, the pipeline will cross the Missouri river, the tribe's main source of drinking water and pass close to the tribal reservation.

David Archambault II, chairman of the Standing Rock tribe send a letter to Donald Trump, urging him not to bypass the environmental analysis, according to him, "the problem with the Dakota Access pipeline is not that it involves development, but rather that it was deliberately and precariously placed without proper consultation with tribal governments. This memo takes further action to disregard tribal interests and the impacts of yesterday's memorandums are not limited to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe. This disregard for tribal diplomatic relations and the potential for national repercussions is utterly alarming" (Milman, 2017, pp. 1-2).

In addition, Archambault attempted to meet with Trump but had no response. More than 150 Native American tribes have united in uproar against the Dakota Access pipeline, with thousands gathering at a protest camp near the North Dakota construction site to decry the potential harm to drinking water and cultural heritage sites.

In December, following months of pressure from protes-

tors, Barack Obama's administration decided to block construction of the pipeline on federal land until an environmental assessment was completed. Opponents of the pipeline also launched a federal lawsuit to halt the \$3.7bn project, which is largely complete aside from the contentious water crossing (Milman, 2017).

Trump's administration intends to complete the Dakota Access project, as well as the Keystone oil pipeline, in order to spark a domestic "energy revolution". As it has been revealed, Trump has held a stake in Energy Transfer Partners, the Texas-based company behind the Dakota Access project. The investment was disclosed last year but Trump's spokesman, without providing evidence, stated that the president has sold his stake in the business and therefore removed the potential conflict of interest (Milman, 2017).

As presidential orders are taking effect, more efforts to privatize indigenous lands can be expected. Positions and opinions concerning privatization differ considerably for many tribes across the U.S. Indigenous tribal leaders. Some believe that moving forward with industry will bring money to poverty-stricken reservations. As Marwayne Mullin, a Republican U.S. Representative from Oklahoma and a Cherokee tribe member who is co-chairing Trump's Native American Affairs Coalition stated, they should take tribal land away from the public treatment - "as long as we can do it without unintended consequences, I think we will have broad support around Indian country" (Nells, 2017, p. 2). As for the other party, they consider that privatization is a violation of Indigenous sovereignty and perverts the sacred responsibility of being caretakers of the (ir) land.

On January 24, 2017, Journalist Tom DiChristopher wrote an article on ignoring of a Standing Rock Sioux issue by President Trump. To the journalist's question "any comment to the Standing Rock community and the protesters out there?" Donald Trump put his head down, pursed his lips and looked in the opposite direction. He then responded to a question about when he expected to make a Supreme Court nomination (DiChristopher, 2017).

According to Tom B.K. Goldtooth, executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network, Trump did not consult with the Standing Rock or other Sioux tribes before signing the executive orders, "these actions by President Trump are insane and extreme and nothing short of attacks on our ancestral homelands as Indigenous peoples. The actions by the president today demonstrate that this Administration is more than willing to violate federal law that is meant to protect Indigenous rights, human rights, the environment and the overall safety of communities for the benefit of the fossil fuel industry" (DiChristopher, 2017, pp. 2-3) stated Goldtooth.

Finally, White House press secretary Sean Spicer noted that Donald Trump intends to work with all parties involved as his administration attempts to advance the project. According to Spicer, President Trump is willing to discuss this problematic issue with all of the individuals that are involved in the Dakota pipeline issue to make sure that it's a deal that benefits all of the parties of interest, or at least gets them something that they want (DiChristopher, 2017).

Interview with the Representative of the Cherokee Nation

On February 20, 2017, an interview was conducted with the representative of the Cherokee Nation – Shawn Wright on the issue of Trump's attitude towards Native Americans. I discussed the issue of Trump's attitude towards Native Americans, with the representative of the Cherokee Nation – Shawn Wright. Mr. Wright is American Sanders Product Line Manager at Amano Pioneer Eclipse from Sparta, North Carolina. He sent me an article concerning Trump's policy towards New Mexico indigenous population. As he stated, this article sums up most Native Americans feelings and concerns at this time.

To my question "since Donald Trump has won the Presidency, how will Native Americans be affected?", Shawn Wright replied that Mr. Trump has a long record of opposing Native American interests in support of his own, "he has in his first days acted in character for the man he has been in the past. I expect to see a policy of breaking up and privatization of Native trust lands as well as attacks on the sovereignty of Native tribal nations" (Shawn Wright). According to my respondent, these will be carried out in hopes of providing economic activity code words for extracting wealth from control of native peoples as well as dismantling policy's aimed at equal nations in place of one nation dominance" (Shawn Wright).

Conclusion

All above-mentioned issues create a pretty hard picture for the local population which are expected to be the cause of the future social confrontations.

As it has been revealed, Native Americans are not going to conform to the existing state of affairs. They will continue to stand together, support one another and protect their rights in the face of broken treaties and outside forces like they have for the past five centuries. They are ready to defend their tribal sovereignty and basic human rights. Especially, young generation of Native Americans will play a crucial role in this fight as indigenous youth is going to continue to hold their ground and nurture the network of solidarity they have built for themselves, their ancestors and their future generations.

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