



WHITECLAY IS CLOSED

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OST Citizens and advocates walk into White Clay for a day of remembrance. (Photo credit: Natalie Hand)

PINE RIDGE --A small group gathered in the notorious border town known as White Clay on Sunday to remember the many relatives that have lost their lives on the streets of this tiny hamlet.

“Today, we come here, not to celebrate, but to remember all those who died in White Clay. Some have been murdered here, some have died from exposure or from alcohol poisoning. We are here to remember the children and pray that they may enjoy a life without alcohol,” stated Bryan Brewer, Sr., former Oglala Sioux Tribal president and outspoken opponent of White Clay beer stores.

After a long week of legal wrangling, the beer stores in White Clay are closed, for now.

On April 19th, the Nebraska Liquor Commission voted to not renew the four liquor licenses to businesses in White Clay, citing concerns about law enforcement after a local official said Sheridan County “absolutely” lacked adequate resources to police the area.



All 4 White Clay Beer Stores were closed on their last day of operation.

However, the beer stores owners appealed and a Lancaster County District Judge overturned the Commission's ruling. But the Nebraska Attorney General intervened in the eleventh hour and blocked the judge's order and has sent the case to the Nebraska Supreme Court.

Joining Brewer on this historic day was long-time Winnebago activist Frank LaMere, who also serves as the Vice Chairman of the Nebraska Democratic Party.

LaMere became emotional when seeing the town empty and the beer stores closed.

"For 113 years, the state of Nebraska wronged the good Lakota people by peddling this poison to them, on designated treaty land that was illegally taken from them. The only right thing to do is to give this land back now. I am proud of my fellow Nebraskans that are standing up to do right by the Oglala Lakota," stated LaMere.



(L to R) Jorge Castillo, Advocacy Director - Alcohol Justice, Former OST Chairman Bryan Brewer, Sr., and John Williams, Walk Manager - National Alliance on Mental Illness. (Photo credit: Natalie Hand)

Multiple outside agencies have pledged to support the Oglala Lakota in their efforts to shut down the beer stores in White Clay and provide emergency services to the street people there.

Alcohol Justice, a California-based alcohol industry watchdog, has been advocating for this closure for several years and attended this weekend's gathering.

we are here to give a voice to those that cannot speak up, especially the children born with fetal alcohol syndrome. And we want to make sure that the public recognizes just how many people have passed away on the streets of White Clay,” noted Sonny Skyhawk, Sicangu Lakota actor, activist and Alcohol Justice Board Member.

Alcohol Justice has committed to work collectively with tribal advocates to promote a sober future campaign for Pine Ridge children through educational materials and mentoring at the grade school level.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) recently provided free training and certified five individuals on Pine Ridge to facilitate peer-led wellness support groups for people living with mental illness.

“It is very common for people with addictions to have underlying mental health issues. I believe that if we start talking about mental illness, people will feel more comfortable to seek help. Our goal is to find community leaders that want to receive training and take a volunteer leadership role to support their communities,” noted John Williams, Miniconjou Lakota and Development Manager of NAMI South Dakota.

One of the biggest challenges facing communities across Indian Country is the lack of available beds at detox/ treatment centers.

“We are here today to stand with the Oglala Lakota and be of service. We will have counselors coming in through the Native Healing program in Rapid City, that will provide counseling, assessments and referrals for individuals as needed,” stated Matt Walz, of Keystone Treatment & Outreach Center in Canton, SD.

Although tribal citizens are divided on the issue of closing White Clay beer stores, most agree that the lawlessness there has left a long legacy of abuse.

“The days of the Nebraskan government’s complicity and the exploitation of a vulnerable people has ended. White Clay has always symbolized the defeat of a people. I am glad that the government of Nebraska will no longer rubber-stamp these alcohol permits for these four corporations. I am wearing red today to remember our missing and murdered Lakota women, who have been raped here, have been beaten here, who have been murdered here, who have been abducted and trafficked on the streets of White Clay,” stated Debra White Plume, Oglala Lakota elder and activist.