

Chris Carlson is wrong

CHIEF ALLAN, Coeur d'Alene Tribe chairman

Before I respond to Chris Carlson's recent column attacking the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and Indian Gaming, I want to start by disclosing a few things.

First, I support Indian gaming. I have seen first-hand how gaming on the Coeur d'Alene Reservation has transformed this community and delivered our people from abject poverty and a century-long dearth of opportunity.

I see the pride in our people that comes from the hope and opportunity that gaming provides. That is precisely the reason Indian gaming was embraced by the United States and the state of Idaho.

Second, I echo what many wonderful people in this community have already expressed; I too am tired of the hostility directed toward the tribe based on false information and inaccurate half-truths. That type of hate-inspired rhetoric should not and cannot be tolerated any longer.

In my experience as chairman of the Coeur d'Alene Tribe and as a tribal member living in this region, I have learned that most people who attack Indian gaming or other tribal issues are usually simply misinformed.

Based on the points in Mr. Carlson's letter, he is no different.

Maybe most important to this discussion is the history behind the tribe's 5 percent education donations, which has been completely lost in the rhetoric.

It was the tribe that insisted on including a provision in our gaming compact that gave 5 percent of our net gaming revenues back to education n not the state. In fact, federal law prohibits states from taxing or assessing fees on tribal gaming. We wanted to give back to education because giving back is part of our culture. It's who we are.

Furthermore, there is a huge disparity in what Carlson claims the "law" mandates and what the gaming compact actually says.

The provision we offered, and that was included in the compact, states "the gaming operation shall contribute five percent of the net revenues from authorized Class II gaming for the financial support of education. The sum each year is to be divided equally between tribal and public education in the region on or near the reservation." (emphasis added).

Most importantly, the final sentence of that provision makes clear that "disbursements of these funds shall be at the sole discretion of the tribe."

That means the tribe gets to decide how we choose to define education and to which organization and institutions we donate. This fact has been completely ignored by Carlson and others who oppose the tribe and Indian gaming.

Our education donations have absolutely been in line with the spirit and intent of that agreement and we are proud to report that we have given more than \$17 million in donations to education to date, with more on the way in 2012.

Like many others, I take exception with Mr. Carlson's assertion that funding for the Kroc Center, Coaches v. Cancer and Gonzaga University does not support education. He obviously is either unaware or ignores the many educational programs offered and successfully implemented by the Kroc Center. We are proud to be a major donor to the Kroc Center, just as we are proud to be a major sponsor of Gonzaga University. Our tribe's deepest roots to modern education are tied to Catholicism through the Jesuits and Gonzaga University. Again, Mr. Carlson either is oblivious or chooses to ignore the direct and unquestionable connection that a donation to Gonzaga University through their athletic program still directly benefits the entire university.

I am still puzzled that Carlson singled out Coaches v. Cancer as not worthy of constituting education. Like most of you reading this, we have lost far too many of our family members to cancer. It is an evil disease that doesn't care about what ethnicity you are, what gender you may be or how much money you have. We are proud to be the title sponsor of Coaches v. Cancer.

The millions of dollars raised by this event allow the American Cancer Society to provide much needed research grants to local universities racing to find a cure to this horrible disease. If that doesn't support education, I don't know what does.

Because we believe in educating the whole person n mind, body and spirit n a good portion of our donations goes to support scholarships, professional ntechnical education, colleges and universities, and other educational projects and programs in the region other than traditional school districts. That being said, we are proud to report that out of the \$17.5 million distributed to date, the significant majority of those funds have gone directly to school districts in the region. Most of these school districts greatly appreciate the financial support we have given and respect the tribe's decisions on where to invest the education dollars.

Mr. Carlson may not approve of gaming in any form. Mr. Carlson may disapprove of the compact negotiated by a governor and business partner he has worked with for nearly a quarter of a century.

Hopefully, he is not advocating that the state of Idaho disavow or dishonor agreements voluntarily entered into, in good faith, with tribal governments in Idaho. We have seen too much of that unfortunate behavior in the past and it should not happen again.

People often fear the unknown. That fear can lead to hatred and anger, and I thought we,

as a community, had moved beyond that. My experience has also shown that once the lies, the myths and the half-truths are laid to rest, those same folks tend to sing a different tune.

I invite Mr. Carlson to visit the reservation and see what we are about. I also invite Mr. Carlson to join me when we deliver an unexpected check to a school or an organization in dire financial need and be there to see the smiles and tears of true appreciation. That is why we do this. Ask around a little Chris, soon enough you will get it too.