

TO: SENATOR JONATHON WINDY BOY,
Chairman, Montana State-Tribal Relations Committee; and
SENATOR JENNIFER FIELDER

FROM: ELAINE WILLMAN, Author, BOARD MEMBER, CITIZENS EQUAL RIGHTS ALLIANCE (CERA)
DATE: MARCH 23, 2015

RE: STATE-TRIBAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
Misinformation Disrespectful of Senator Jennifer Fielder

This memorandum is submitted to clarify potential misinformation received by the Montana State-Tribal Affairs Committee regarding Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA), and its relationship with presenters at our numerous national and regional conferences over the past 20 years.

CERA educational workshops traditionally invite experts and presenters from a range of organizations across the country that provide attendees with helpful information. Presenters representing various organizations are not asked to endorse CERA in order to participate; nor does CERA endorse any guest presenters or organizations. The exchange of educational information is very helpful to our conference and workshop attendees. Just a cursory list of such presenters at CERA conferences include:

Dr. William B. Allen, former Commissioner on the U.S. Commissioner on Civil Rights (USCCR)
George Skibine, Former BIA Executive Director, Department of Interior
Ilya Shapiro, Constitutional Expert, CATO Institute, Washington, D.C.
Larry Arndt, President, Hillsdale College, Hillsdale, MI
Richard Rowland, Founder, Grassroot Institute of Hawaii, Honolulu, HI
Faculty and Student Presenters from Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA
Dr. David Yeagley, Comanche Tribal Member, Author, Oklahoma
Andy Blom, Executive Director, American Principles Project, Washington, D.C.

CERA is not a “racist” organization and is held in high regard by numerous national experts and organizations. CERA originally organized in the mid-1980’s to assist enrolled tribal members who have very limited civil rights within tribal governing systems. The Indian Civil Rights Act of 1968 (ICRA) has no enforcement mechanisms whereby a tribal member can require that his/her civil rights be provided in tribal courts or other tribal administrative processes. Tribal members cannot go into a state or federal court with a grievance about their tribal government either. With the onset of off-reservation casinos and other tribal expansions, CERA’s membership has grown exponentially. We are the only national organization focused on education specific to federal Indian policy government decisions, so we are sometimes a “target” for those with differing views.

CERA’s entire mission is to educate tribal members and the general public as to government decisions that formulate federal Indian policy, whether Congressional, Legislative, Judicial or Administrative. Such decisions are just that—government decisions—that impact the lives of enrolled tribal members and often all persons residing within the boundaries of Indian reservations. Affected citizens have the right, and perhaps the duty to express their views on government decisions at every level.

Ongoing respect for American Indian history, for Native American culture, as well as all cultures, is fundamental to CERA Board members and the national organization. Respect for culture is quite separate from research and education about government decisions. Because CERA’s educational agenda is sometimes ill-received by tribal governments and affiliated national Indian organizations, CERA is sometimes unfairly smeared with occasional harmful name-calling. We are accustomed to but not silenced by such. What is most unfortunate, is when high quality and credentialed experts such as those listed above, and more recently, Senator Jennifer Fielder, who provided a presentation about the American Lands Council at a CERA Workshop on September 25th in Kalispell, are also inappropriately subjected to slurs and false accusations. Such accusations are wrong, mean-spirited and should not rise to any level of importance with the Montana State-Tribal Affairs Committee.