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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
April 7, 1995

Dear Editor:

After having read the article by [Ms.] Beth R. Ritter, "The Politics of Retribalization: The Northern Ponca Case" in the August 1994 issue of *Great Plains Research*, I must take sharp exception to the subjective and erroneous conclusion regarding why I worked successfully against the establishment of a traditional residential reservation for the Northern Ponca Tribe. After having accurately cited my motives for opposing the creation of residential reservations on page 248, [Ms.] Ritter subjectively and erroneously concludes that my "political priority was to curry favor with his [my] non-Indian constituency" by avoiding a "loss of property tax revenue that would result from taking Indian land into trust status." That is simply not true and there is no evidence for such a conclusion. In fact as a member of the House Interior Committee early in my tenure in the U.S. House of Representatives and on subsequent occasions, I consistently voted against establishing additional traditional "residential" Indian reservations--even though none of those instances involved Indians from my district or state and thus had no effect upon taxable real estate in Nebraska.

It seems to me I made it clear that this position was taken as a matter of principle through the language which was quoted on page 248; I am concerned about raising more Indian children in the deprivation that unfortunately continues to exist on our Indian reservations. There is nothing in the record to support [Ms.] Ritter's subjective conclusion about my motives to the contrary. I am particularly offended by her conclusions since I have been formally recognized by various Indian groups for my unusual and effective legislative dedication to assisting Native Americans.

Sincerely,

DOUG BEREUTER
Member of Congress
1st District, Nebraska

May 8, 1995

Dear Editor,

Congressman Bereuter's letter of April 7, 1995, regarding my interpretation of his motivation of having "worked successfully against the establishment of a traditional residential reservation for the Northern Ponca" deserves further comment. In responding to my article "The Politics of Retribalization: The Northern Ponca Case," Congressman Bereuter has clarified his motivations for my benefit and that of your readers. His position has consistently been to deny a residential reservation to all Indians, whether from his congressional district or not. Fortunately, for the tribes who have received reservations during Bereuter's tenure, his "principle has not been the prevailing attitude in federal Indian policy formulation since the Termination era.

Congressman Bereuter has expressed concern over the "deprivation which will undoubtedly continue to exist on our nation's Indian reservations in the future" (p. 248). The negative aspects of reservation life Congressman Bereuter perceives are the direct result of over two hundred years of paternalistic federal Indian policy which has sought to systematically dispossess and assimilate Native Americans. Native Americans retain roughly 4% of their aboriginal landbase in the continental United States; the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska currently owns approximately .007% (160 acres of 2.3 million acres) of their legally recognized aboriginal territory. Under Congressman Bereuter's leadership, the federal government could address many of the structural causes and consequences of poverty in Indian Country by honoring the treaty obligations incurred by the federal government, including the restoration of the tribal landbase, the promotion of the viable economic development strategies and the empowerment of tribal governments.

By denying the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska the opportunity to voluntarily re-establish their traditional landbase (at some point in the future), Congressman Bereuter has perpetuated the assimilationist policy of forcing Ponca children and grandchildren to grow up away from a community of their elders and cultural traditions. He has also constrained the range of economic development alternatives available to the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska. In addition, Congressman Bereuter's "principle" of insuring the Ponca would never have a reservation nearly cost the Tribe their bid to

reverse three decades of Tribal termination. The Ponca Tribe of Nebraska is a federally-recognized Tribe which will never have a reservation; such is the legacy of Congressman Bereuter’s “unusual and effective legislative dedication to assisting Native Americans.”

Sincerely,

Beth R. Ritter

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
June 29, 1995

Dear Editor:

[Ms.] Beth R. Ritter’s letter of May 8, 1995, only conveys additional erroneous information about my actions with respect to the Northern Ponca Tribe and their reservation. Neither I nor the Congress have done anything that denies the Ponca a “tribal land base” or assures that they “would never have a reservation.” We created a reservation; fortunately it simply is not a residential reservation. Instead a very innovative program has been funded to create affordable housing for the Ponca tribal members in the places where so many of them actually live—in Norfolk, Omaha, Lincoln, and other locations in South Dakota and Nebraska. That is an approach desired by their leadership and by most members of the Ponca Tribe.

[Ms.] Ritter ought to have the grace to apologize or at least stop mischaracterizing my actions and those of the Congress. Either she is guilty of sloppy research or she has decided to just take a gratuitous cheap shot at a public official without knowing the facts. If she wanted to know what actions I have taken, my views, or the relevant facts about the actions of the Executive Branch or Congress, she could have interviewed me.

Also if [Ms.] Ritter had bothered to ask my colleagues about my role in Indian affairs before slamming me, she would find that on a bipartisan basis they would agree I am among five or six Members of Congress who have done the most over the last ten or more years to improve the lives of Indians

who live on or off reservations. She would also find that I have done more than anyone to assist Indians to become homeowners.

While I take pride in these accomplishments, I don't do it for praise or recognition; it is only a matter of discharging my representational duties in a conscientious fashion in an area that deserves attention. What I don't deserve, however, is to have my reputation casually besmirched by someone as ill-informed on this matter as [Ms.] Ritter.

Sincerely,

DOUG BEREUTER
Member of Congress
1st District, Nebraska

Dear Editor:

After reading through my dissertation notes and consulting with Kiowa friends I would like to acknowledge an ethnographic error in my article, "Kiowa Powwows: Tribal Identity Through the Continuity of the Gourd Dance" *GPR* 4(2) : 257-69. The error pertains to the opening songs for the Gourd Dance (p. 263). In Carnegie Park during the July Fourth Kiowa Gourd Clan celebration, the Flag Song is sung early in the morning as the American flag is raised, and is followed later in the morning by sessions of the Rabbit Dance. The Flag Song is also sung at the end of the afternoon session of gourd dancing, when "retreat" is called. When the gourd dance begins around 2:00 pm., the Starting Song initiates the dance; the song is divided into two separate, consecutive renditions, distinguished by soft drum beats on the edge of the drum, versus loud beats (perhaps honor beats). The latter signify when the dancers stand up from their benches beneath the willow branch (not cottonwood) arbor, and begin to dance in place. However, the soft rendition of the song is sung at least four times before the loud rolling of the drum signifies when the dancers can get up and dance. I apologize for this error.

[Signed]

Benjamin R. Kracht
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