

Lower Brule Sioux Tribe misses deadline for Land Buy-Back program

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LOWER BRULE - Kevin Wright, Acting Chairman for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe announced that the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has missed the deadline for administering their Cobell Land Buy Back program.

"At the August 5, 2015 council session we were notified that we missed a deadline for the Indian Buy Back program," Wright posted on his Facebook page.

Leadership of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has been in question since their general election a year ago in September when Wright was elected as vice-chairman and Sonny Ziegler and DesiRee LaRoche were elected as council representatives.

According to Wright, the late Chairman Michael Jandreau, Secretary/Treasurer Red Langdeau and Councilman John McCauley stonewalled tribal council meetings for months by walking out of council.

Tribal Court Judge B.J. Jones ordered the LBST to resume meetings in March citing it was obstructing the rights of tribal citizens. Then on April 3, 2015 Jandreau died in a Sioux Falls hospital as a result of heart complications.

Jandreau's death came amid controversy over a January Human Rights Watch's scathing report accusing tribal leaders of mismanagement of millions of dollars "earmarked for programs meant to provide essential services, alleviate poverty, or promote much needed economic development."

Wright's takeover of leadership of the tribe was met with hostility from Jandreau supporters and shortly after taking charge, he ordered a freeze of all federal draw down monies until a full investigation of financial transactions could be conducted.

The most recent controversy has arisen over a question about who would administer the Land Buy Back Program for the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and what has been termed "disallowable" costs.

According to Wright, Katherin Grounds, Tribal Relations Advisor for the Land Buy Back Program, visited the tribe and informed them the way that LBST was

trying to utilize Land Buy Back funds were considered "disallowable" costs.

"They thought it was odd that this tribe was trying to use these funds for basically salaries and other unallowable costs. We heard about it before but we didn't fully understand what it was about," Wright said.

Wright said he felt that it was Lee Brennan's responsibility, as Tribal Manager, to inform the Chairman's office about what was going on with the Land Buy Back Program and when Grounds presented this information, he felt appalled.

"It sounded like there was a half a million that they could've appropriated but in question was what they wanted to use this money for," he said and that a letter he wrote to the Interior had raised a red flag.

"They wanted to make sure that the government would distribute those funds and not allow the tribe to utilize them the way they wanted to. And there were only two contact people on there, that was Lee Brennan who is a nonmember and Mike Jandreau."

He said the tribe will still be able to receive the funds but it won't be until 2016 because Interior wants to figure out who is the point of contact, because all the other tribes have their tribal councils as point of contact.

"Our tribe is the only one that had two people and that was Lee Brennan and Mike Jandreau. And now that Jandreau has passed it is unclear to them who the point of contact is, because Lee Brennan is just a Tribal manager and he is a non-native on top of that," Wright said.

He has called for the termination Brennan because of what he terms "incompetence."

"I took it upon myself to terminate his contract with us because of lack of communication. Now he refuses to leave and we can't get him out of the building. He is just staying there he refuses to leave. He failed to come and inform my office of this big issue and we lost out on being able to utilize those funds," he said and that now the federal government is going to step in and distribute the funds as they see fit.

As to whether or not the tribe will still get their land buy back he said, "I understand is that they will but it's the government that will have final say as to who will benefit from the land buyback program," Wright concluded.

Native Sun News tried to contact Brennan, but as of press time he has not responded. We also attempted to contact Katherine Grounds for comment but have not received a response.

– Ernestine Chasing Hawk can be contacted at editor@nsweekly.com

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