

Written Testimony of Jason Small
Northern Cheyenne Tribal Member &
Journeyman Boilermaker, Local 11, Montana
HC 42, Box 560, Busby, MT

Before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

The Honorable Steve Daines

**Field Hearing, “Empowering Indian Country through Coal, Jobs &
Self Determination”**

April 8th, 2015

Crow Agency, MT

Senator Daines and members of the Committee: My name is Jason Small. I am an enrolled member of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and reside on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. I am also a journeyman boilermaker, member of Montana's Local 11, and my comments today are based upon my experience working in coal-related employment across the Nation, including as a union steward. I am also one of two internationally certified welding instructors in Montana. I teach at the Spencer Benson Welding Training Center, Colstrip, MT which assists many young people, especially members of the Crow and Northern Cheyenne Tribes to enter the boilermaker trade. That center is financially supported by the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers and PPL as a way to help people gain a trade, particularly those from the Cheyenne Reservation with 70% unemployment.

Thank you Senator for arranging this hearing, specifically asking how the Congress can be more helpful to Tribes such as the Crow and Navajo who are developing coal resources and the Northern Cheyenne who will hopefully pursue this option to address unacceptable rates of unemployment and poverty on our Reservation. As you probably know, Indian Reservations contain 30% of the nation's coal reserves west of the Mississippi, an estimated 1.5 trillion dollars of energy resources. In my opinion, coal must continue to be the mainstay in the energy mix. While wind, solar, bio-mass, and hydro energy can contribute to our national energy needs, it is clear they cannot totally replace coal as a base load power sources.

I am a strong proponent for development of the rich Northern Cheyenne coal reserves, recently expressing my reasons in widely publicized Op-Ed piece. While development is opposed by some, I firmly believe that a majority of tribal members are favorable inclined. So do some of our traditional leaders such as Tim Lame Woman, General District Chairperson for the Reservation, a direct descendant of Chief Little Wolf and member of the traditional Elkhorn Scrapers Society . Tribal President Llevando "Cowboy" Fisher promised to hold a referendum vote on that question and I believe it will overwhelmingly pass. In a 1990's vote, the majority of tribal members said "Yes" to coal development, but "No" to coal bed methane. Still, our current leaders feel that another vote is necessary.

The main reason it will pass, in my opinion, is because of the positive experiences that the Northern Cheyenne have had at Colstrip, through employment and other financial benefits from agreements related to Units 3 & 4 and the Western Energy Coal Mine. Presently, about 125 tribal members are employed at PPL Generating Stations and the mine. Many others have

retired, now enjoying good retirement income. Those employees draw some of the highest hourly wages in the State and are thus able to provide very well for their immediate families and often extended family members. This employment which started in the 1980's has significantly changed the attitudes of many Northern Cheyenne about coal development because it has enabled them to break out of poverty. In addition, those companies provide scholarships, charitable donations and support environmental air quality on the Reservation to the tune of about \$500,000 per year. Over a hundred other tribal members have gained college degrees as a result of the PPL and Western Energy scholarship programs.

Over the years, the Cheyenne have learned about reclamation, developing confidence that the lands can be fully restored. Indeed Rich Spang, a great-great grandson of one our most famous Chiefs, Dull Knife heads up Western Energy's Reclamation Program.. Under federal and state law, the companies are held to very high standards and many of the Cheyenne have learned that the lands disturbed by mining when reclaimed are actually in better condition than pre-mining. The water comes back; the grazing is prime, with all of the traditional plants re-introduced and the reclaimed lands is prime wildlife habitat. Western has received numerous national awards for reclamation excellence including the National Institute for Urban Wildlife. In addition to federal and state laws, Tribes can enact additional law to protect sacred sites and address other tribal concerns related to reservation coal development.

The energy complexes at Colstrip and at Crow provide profound benefits to the region, State and two Reservations. For example, economists from University of Montana provide the following statistics:

- The Colstrip generating plants provide 3,740 jobs directly related to energy production in Montana, 3,500 in eastern Montana. An additional 2,688 private sector jobs are related.
- Personal income from coal-related employment is about 363 million.
- PPL Colstrip employs 363 permanent workers, including 41 tribal members, one-eighth of the workforce. Others are employed by subcontractors, including during the annual overhaul when 680 are employed by North American Energy Services alone including many Navajo boilermakers.
- The Western Energy Mine, Colstrip currently employs 80 minorities, the majority Northern Cheyenne, nearly one-third of the craft workforce. This satisfies an original

tribal goal of developing a trained work force for the day when the Northern Cheyenne would develop their own reserves.

- The beneficial impacts of the Westmoreland Mine at Crow are even more powerful and I leave that discussion to Chairman Old Coyote.

In conclusion, I suggest that responsible coal development can be a major key enabling the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and its members to rise out of poverty and achieve self-sufficiency. Your national leadership and compassion for the native people is essential in this struggle. Please keep up the good fight, particularly with the unrealistic and punitive regulations being pushed by EPA. While know, that additional regulations will be mandated, they must be pursued in a reasonable manner which will not devastate the economy of southeastern Montana and still allow for responsible development.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.