

Fremont County Commission Chairman threatens to pull COVID-related support from Northern Arapaho Tribe

Statement from NABC Chairman Lee Spoonhunter

“Wyoming remains in the grip of a public health crisis due to COVID-19, and no corner of our state has been hit harder than the Wind River Reservation. The human toll has been unspeakably tragic – every one of us knows a friend, family member, elder or colleague lost to this terrible virus.

“That’s why I’m so deeply troubled to learn about a threat made this week by Fremont County Commission Chairman Travis Becker against the Wind River Reservation and Arapaho people. Chairman Becker called state Rep. Andi Clifford and demanded I apologize and retract my earlier comments to a legislative panel regarding substandard healthcare treatment for Native Americans, as well as lingering bias against and stigma toward the Tribal community that this pandemic has exposed. Unless satisfied with my apology, Chairman Becker said he would revoke our Tribe’s use of county vehicles for the transport of patients to and from the Wind River Family & Community Health Care and White Buffalo Recovery Center.

“Let me be clear: I won’t apologize for pointing out the kind of discrimination – whether overt or subtle – that Tribal members in Wyoming and across our country know well.

“I won’t apologize for shining a light on anti-Tribal prejudice that impacts every aspect of our daily lives, including the quality of health care we receive in our times of greatest need.

“And I won’t apologize for talking openly and honestly about systemic racism and how it has contributed to a COVID-19 pandemic that continues to infect and kill our Arapaho people and members of Indian Country [in disproportionate numbers](#).

“While I was imprecise in a portion of my remarks to the legislative panel when I said Tribal Members were transported from SageWest hospitals in the back of Fremont County Sheriff’s Office pickups (the pickups were actually used to move Members from the county fairgrounds to a Tribal quarantine facility), my larger point stands. In fact, Chairman Becker’s threat against the Northern Arapaho Tribe and its people - who are county residents– perfectly illustrates the kind of anti-Tribal sentiment that remains all-too-common.

“COVID-19 has posed an unprecedented challenge to this community we share. I remain hopeful that, with collaboration and continued open dialogue, we may emerge from this pandemic stronger on behalf of all residents of Fremont County.”