



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Ms. McMullen:

It is unfortunate that neither the leadership of my agency nor my department had the courtesy to inform me that I had been invited by the House Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs to testify about conditions on the Spirit Lake Reservation at the Subcommittee's Hearing on June 24, 2014.

Associate Commissioner Chang's testimony was, at best, confusing where it was not false. In the second sentence of her prepared testimony she speaks about the Administration's concerns about child safety and well-being at Spirit Lake. Finally, after more than two years, 13 Mandated Reports and numerous emails to ACF leadership about the lack of safety for Spirit Lake kids, someone, other than me, is saying safety of children is of concern. Of course that contradicts an exchange I had with Mr. McKearn, Director of the Office of Legislative Affairs and Budget for ACF, back in July, 2012 when I was told that the safety of kids at Spirit Lake was not a priority. I guess the leadership of ACF never has to explain their position nor apologize when that position is proven wrong.

Ms. Chang's claim that BIA has addressed, "...most notably the safety checks prior to placement" is simply false. If the BIA had addressed the safety checks prior to placement, Laurynn Whiteshield would be alive today, soon to celebrate her fourth birthday with her twin sister, Michaela. Instead she has been in the ground for more than a year, dead at the hands of her step-grandmother, who, it was well-known by most families on Spirit Lake, beat and abused her own children so badly they were removed from her home.

Ms. Chang goes on with the assertion about the strengths at Spirit Lake, saying, "Perhaps the most important strength is the commitment of the new leadership under Chairman McDonald and the work of the BIA." Early on in this process the BIA and Tribal leadership were presented a list of 137 children who were in uncertain placements or unaccounted for at that time. At the Subcommittee Hearing Ms. Merrick-Brady, the Acting Director of Spirit Lake's Tribal Social Services, explained that 66 children had been found and accounted for. That means that after 13 Mandated Reports, numerous detailed, factual emails about continuing abuse of children at Spirit Lake, 21 months after the BIA Strike Team arrived with much fanfare and ten months after Chairman McDonald was elected Chair there are still more kids unaccounted for than accounted for. How many of these unaccounted for children have been trafficked into the man camps of the Bakken oil fields, just a few hours down the road from Spirit Lake? If the safety of the children of Spirit Lake is our top priority, this performance should be called what it is, "weak and inadequate".

Most witnesses at congressional hearings are told that if they don't know the answer to a question, there is no problem in saying so and offering to provide the information requested in a few days. When asked a question about how often I had been at Spirit Lake, Ms. Chang seemed eager to offer her lying answer, saying that I had never been there, giving the impression we had discussed that question just the night before. Ms. Chang has never sought me out to ask me any question of any kind. Why would a woman of her stature lie so blatantly about me? Was she seeking to tarnish my reputation? As I cautioned the Spirit Lake Chair in an email last week, quoting the late Daniel Patrick Moynihan who frequently said, "Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not his own facts."

I have been to Spirit Lake three or four times in the last four years. Prior to that time each year I routinely met a couple of times a year in Bismarck with all of the child welfare directors from the four North Dakota reservations. I attended their meetings, spoke when asked and sought to assist them to develop more productive relationships with state human services staff to assist them in reducing their caseloads per worker to the levels prevalent in the majority community.

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