

Indian Country Response to Cobell Payments Overwhelmingly Positive

WASHINGTON, Dec. 28. -- The response of Native Americans to the distribution of individual checks settling the long-running Cobell lawsuit over the government's mishandling of individual Indian trust accounts and trust lands has been overwhelmingly positive and highly gratifying, lawyers handling the settlement said today.

Approximately 263,500 individuals have been sent their Historical Accounting Class payments. This includes 208,500 checks mailed within a few days of the court's approval on December 12 and 54,950 payments wired to the Treasury Department for deposit into Individual Indian Money accounts. Over two-thirds of checks have been cashed within 10 days of their arrival and over 80% of class members have received their Historical Accounting payments.

That is a level much higher than seen in most class-action settlements, said David Smith, an attorney with Kilpatrick Townsend, the law firm representing the class members.

Jennifer Keough of the Garden City Group Inc. (GCG), the court-appointed claims administrator handling the distribution, confirmed that view "In our experience this is an extraordinarily high percentage of awards received and cashed in a very short time," she said.

A call center, handling inquiries from Native Americans about the payments has received 425,000 calls in the past 10 days, Smith said.

That's about 50,000 calls a day, a huge volume considering that about 329,000 individuals were believed in the Historical Accounting class and about 500,000 in the total settlement group, Smith said.

In order to help more individuals to resolve their questions, the call centers hours of operation have been expanded into the evening, Ms. Keough said.

The response of class members has been overwhelming positive with many calling the center to update their contact

information, she said.

"GCG has added operators to help handle the call volume and they are determined to see that all remaining checks get into the beneficiaries' hands as quickly as possible," she said.

"We are heartened and gratified that there is such strong interest in Indian Country in the Cobell settlement," Smith said.

"The addresses we are using were supplied to us by the Department of Interior," he said. "As we learned during the 16 years that this case was in the courts, not all of Interior's account information was accurate."

"However, beneficiaries who did not receive checks have contacted us providing accurate contact information, and Indian Country can be assured that we are doing everything we can to expedite the mailing and, when necessary, the forwarding of checks to the correct addresses," Smith said. An additional 16,500 checks will be delivered in the next few days to updated addresses recently received.

Any checks sent to a deceased individual should be returned for a new check that will be sent to that individual's estate so it can go directly to the heirs, he said.

The strong call volume and the cashing of the checks show that Indian Country was overwhelmingly supportive of the settlement, Smith said.

The Cobell lawsuit was filed in 1996 by Louise Cobell, a member of the Blackfeet Nation, over the federal government's handling of individual Indian money accounts. Ms. Cobell died last year before the settlement checks could be delivered to the estimated 500,000 account holders.

For additional information, individuals should visit the Cobell website: www.cobellsettlement.com. The toll free information number is 1-800-961-6109. Questions may also be e-mailed to Info@IndianTrust.com. The mailing address is: Indian Trust Settlement, P.O. Box 9577 Dublin, OH 43017-4877.



New Building Accepted: The new Cultural Center was recently accepted from Maskai Builders. The new facility should be in use in a few weeks. The open house will be announced soon. (staff photo)

Alex E. Smith Accepted into Honor Society at OCCC

Sac and Fox Tribal Member Alex E. Smith has been accepted into the Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society at OCCC in Oklahoma City. Currently, Alex holds a 4.0 GPA and is pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree while majoring in Interactive Multimedia Graphic Design through the Graphic Communications courses at Oklahoma City Community College and will graduate next spring.

Formerly the Graphic Designer for Sac and Fox Nation Casino in Shawnee (and Stroud), Alex is now designing full-time for CopyFast, one of Oklahoma City's premier print companies, while attending evening courses to finish his degree at OCCC.

Alex lives in OKC with his wife Stacey, son Nathan Eugene and step-daughters Rynne and Romy. Alex is the son of Virginia Riley of Shawnee and the Grandson of deceased Sac and Fox Tribal Member Charlie Smith.



Alex E. Smith



Sac and Fox Principal Chief, George Thurman recently attended a conference where President Barack Obama and Cabinet Officials met with Tribal Leaders to reaffirm Nation-to-Nation Relationship. (photo courtesy of NCAI)

Shackelford Sworn In



Troy Shackelford was sworn in as the new Grievance Committee member by Principal Chief George Thurman on Tuesday, December 18, 2012. (photo by Sandra Massey, Historic Preservation Officer)

A letter from Virginia Conallis

I am not Sac and Fox, sometimes feel like I am, you see I was married to Clifford Conallis, a Sac and Fox for 50 years and 8 months. We had 6 children: Clifford Carl, Judy Kay, Jay Von, Bettina Gail, Gloria Gay, and Martha Ann. Their grandparents were Joe and Mattie Conallis. We lived at the Sac and Fox agency for a good while. I made my daughters and daughters-in-law Indian shawls, loved to make fry bread and corn soup, camp and go to the Pow Wows and visit with our Indian friends, so you see how I am part Sac and Fox.

My children went to school with their friends and I made many friends over the years with Sac and Fox people. Most of my children dance at Pow Wows and we really enjoy our Sac and Fox people.

I am now 89 years old, so I've enjoyed them many years. I feel Sac and Fox even though I only married one.

I am wife of Clifford (Pete) Conallis, Virginia Conallis. I have made many friends among the Indian people.

ATTENTION TRIBAL MEMBERS

A MEMBER OF THE TAX COMMISSION STAFF WILL NOW BE AT 1st INDIAN BAPTIST CHURCH CUSHING OKLAHOMA 1034 EAST WALNUT ONCE A MONTH.

THE TAX COMMISSION WILL BE THERE 2nd THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH WE WILL BE ABLE TO BETTER SERVE TRIBAL MEMBERS LIVING IN THE CUSHING AREA WITH MOTOR VEHICLE REGISTRATION AND ANY OTHER SERVICE THAT WE CAN ASSIST YOU WITH.

JANUARY 2013				
SAC AND FOX NATION FOOD DISTRIBUTION PROGRAM				
STROUD WAREHOUSE (918) 968-3030		1-800-256-3398		
SHAWNEE OFFICE (405) 395-0063		1-866-622-2310		
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
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