



Teepees at the [Crow Fair, held on the Crow Reservation](#) in Montana. This year's event -- the 100th annual -- takes place August 15-20. Photo: [Jeremiah M. Murphy](#)

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## Tribal corruption remains a target of the conservative media

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Wednesday, August 1, 2018

### Targeting tribal corruption

Separating race-baiting from legit journalism

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RAPID CITY— For 85 years tribal corruption has been a common theme on every reservation from Florida to Alaska, and an inviting target for right wing media, philosophically opposed to what they consider a bloated BIA budget, and the nanny state largesse keeping tribes from becoming economically independent.

This summer, Daily Caller reporter Thomas Phippen has posted a series of articles focusing on tribal corruption, and although well written, and factual, there is an underlying agenda that drives Daily Caller interest and presentation.

The Daily Caller is a website that was established on January 11, 2010, by Tucker Carlson and former vice president Dick Cheney aide Neil Patel. Carlson told the Washington Post that his website would not reflect any particular political ideology, but would offer “breaking stories of importance,” however, it wasn’t long before columnist Mickey Kaus quit because Carlson declined to post a Kaus column critical of the biased coverage FOX News was giving the hot button immigration debate.

Given that Carlson has turned Phippen loose on the topic of Indian corruption, it is not unreasonable to assume both consider the treaty obligated relationship between tribes and the federal government, “nanny state regulation.”

What Phippen isn’t: he isn’t some hack blogger posting hyperbole and blatant race-baiting invective. His reporting is well organized, direct, factual, and he endeavors to give both sides of the story.

Here are some of Phippen’s Daily Caller contributions:

From [July 17, 2018](#): “The government is asking two American Indian tribes to return thousands of federal dollars spent on a Christmas party and gifts, and justify millions more that the tribe might have improperly spent on vehicles, construction and overhead costs like internet services.

“The Northern Arapaho and Eastern Shoshone Tribes on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming could not support how they spent \$6.2 million in federal funds meant to build bridges and transportation infrastructure for the reservation, according to a government watchdog, and part of the blame for the messy accounting practices falls on the federal government’s oversight. The Wind River Tribes submitted inaccurate and unsupported expenditures to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), failed to turn in a single audit on time and spent money on indirect overhead costs without negotiating an appropriate rate with the government, the office of the inspector general (OIG) for the Bureau of Indian Affairs said in a final report released Monday.”

Phippen reports that according to that final BIA report, the tribal accounting system was inadequate to manage federal funds, which, given they have had the better part of a century to get their accounting house in order, is justifiably alarming. Apparently the BIA did not review financial status reports in a timely manner and “failed to provide adequate training for its own staff to oversee the management of the tribal contract,” according to the OIG report.

What is disturbing, is despite the obvious right wing agenda of the Daily Caller, Phippen’s reports almost write themselves because the relationship between the BIA and tribal governments appears to be chronically corrupt and incompetent.

Now we jump to the Crow Tribe, from the [June 25, 2018, Daily Caller article](#) by Phippen:

“An American Indian tribe could not account for \$14 million of U.S. taxpayer funding intended for road projects, according to an audit by the inspector general.

“The Crow Tribe of Montana was classified as ‘high risk’ by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) for failing to properly document millions of dollars received from the government under the Tribal Transportation Program (TTP), government auditors said in a report released Monday.

“‘We could not perform the audit because the contractor and the BIA could not provide the necessary documentation for its contract or claim,’ the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) for the Department of the Interior (DOI) said.”

“The tribe did not submit financial reports on time, and some of the reports were off by millions of dollars, the OIG stated. Some reports were not submitted at all. The tribe claimed it spent a total of \$14,492,813 on road construction and repairs, but didn’t detail the individual expenditures in any submitted reports or ledgers.”

At this point, Phippen returns to a recurring and damning theme: “The lack of a trustworthy accounting system in the tribe was evident in the inconsistencies of the tribe’s responses to the OIG. After claiming to spend the \$14 million, the Crow Tribe returned a general ledger that said it spent \$10,813,971.”

The OIG report is disturbing similar to the previous Wind River report: “These issues demonstrated that the Tribe did not have the necessary internal controls to properly report expenses and reconcile its records,” the OIG auditors wrote. “We conclude that the Tribe’s accounting system is inadequate to handle Federal funds.”

Phippen’s attempts to reach the Crow Tribe for comment, failed, but given the gist of the OIG report, there was little tribal officials could have said in their defense.

Phippen’s article from [November, 14, 2016](#): “Some American Indian tribes appear to have trouble managing government grants. “American Indian governing authorities have been plagued with corruption for years. A 2013 Associated Press review of audits and investigative reports found that out of 551 tribal governments, 124 routinely had complaints filed against them.”

Patterns emerge from Phippen’s reporting on tribal corruption. If tribal government is so pervasively incompetent and corrupt, and BIA oversight so woefully undertrained and ineffective, how did it get that way and why does it persist?

The roots of the relationship can be traced back to June of 1934. The country was in the throes of the Great Depression. President Roosevelt (FDR), had a mandate from the 1932 election, to take drastic measures to save the country. His answer was the New Deal, and one aspect of that legislation was nicknamed the “Indian New Deal,” or the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA).



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**Dave Hines**

At the core of all this "miss spent" money is what Federal agency? BINGO!!! The BIA. Thee Government Agency asigned "TRUST RESPONCIBILITY" Remove the layers and anyone with common sense knows that moneys are sent to the tribes through the 638 proccess. Yet the BIA employees get a pass? They see these pass through dollars going through the system and no questions are asked. No documantation checked. Every time there is a failure the BIA is usaully behind the scenes. THEY DONT DO THEIR JOBS. Now we hear that the "Great Land Buy Back" is SCREWED UP.

Like · Reply · 27w



**Zelbe Qahi**

Tribal governments are there to serve the federal government using tribal rolls and lands as economic hostages. Until the BIA is disbanded and tribes no longer need federal dollars to function, this will continue. Nepotism and corrupt officials that keep a bubble around whom benefits tribal operations and who doesn't has always been a problem, but I don't see the very government of this United States as the model to follow either.

Like · Reply · 1 · 39w · Edited



**Rowland Mediciahorse**

As a member of the Crow tribe i have seen through the years numerous administrations come and go .....each one says i will turn things around for the betterment of the tribe..... it never happens .....we live in extreme poverty while the same families and directors ...advisers continue to get flipped over to the next administration....it will take some time to rebuild.....just about everything the tribe has tried to do has failed misserably....cant keep stores open .....cant pay our bills.....money that comes and goes out from each department should be public info.....until this B.S. stops we ... [See More](#)

Like · Reply · 40w



**Dean Wallowing Bull**

There is way more misspent money at wind river. The Northern Arapaho tribe used our %15 percent money from the salazar settlements to pay back the money. That way their cousins or previous councils would not be indicted.

Like · Reply · 43w



**Michael Kotutwa Johnson**

First off tribal governments are not traditional. They are a means to control our people and our natural resources. Secondly, there is no accountability on most reservations, but we freely take what the federal government gives us. Lastly, we need to wake up and put leaders who are qualified to run our governments like a buisiness and not elect our relatives to take care of our own best-interests.

Like · Reply · 3y



**Ken Edwards**

Very well said and stated. Clear and concise straight to the point concerning the heart of the problem. And it is not just in the Native American, rest assured it is throughout in politics no matter what culture it is SMH

Like · Reply · 2y



**Carol Kelly**

Believe it or not: I have been seeing rays of hope and change on some US reservations, over the past 10 or so yrs. A trend that I pray continues. A new problem, is some tribes blanetly eliminating duley enroled individuals from tribal membership.

Like · Reply · 3y

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