

Get to the root of problem

By Bertrand J. Adams, Sr.

Native Americans are facing serious problems. The dilemmas we endure are not confined only to Native communities — they are universal problems. As a Native group, when we begin to concentrate on and solve those problems we are most familiar with, we will be helping to solve the many ills our nation is experiencing as well.

As we embark upon the task of solving our difficulties, it is wise to get to the root of the problem. In many of our quandaries, we have a tendency to fix things with band aids — but these repairs are only temporary ones. Usually, the problems will emerge somewhere else and in various forms.

Isn't it better to get to the root of the problem rather than treat the symptom? In talking to many people about society's ills, a majority agree that the problems we are facing today are spiritual and moral ones, and the manifestation of these afflictions come in the form of political, economical, and social issues. We have a tendency to think that government should solve our problems for us. Let's admit: it is because of our social predicaments we have burdened our government we have such a huge national debt. We need to admit responsibilities ought to be put in their proper perspective.

Here is an example. When we talk about family values, I believe we identify a father, a mother, and children. We can throw in a cat or a dog if we wish. To expand this nice little circle, we include grandparents and other extended family members. This band of individuals should be linked together like a chain. Herein lies our strength. This is the true value of a family. At the core, it is incomplete when either one of the parent is absent, or there are no children. Today, the breakdown of the family unit is a serious problem. This is because of our lack of decent values.

It is parents responsibility to teach their children proper values. The schools, the churches, synagogues, religious institutions, and other organizations are only helpers to the home. In Native cultures, the family was the most significant unit in society. The home used to be the center of all living. When there are no parents in the home to make a place secure and safe for children, children emerge with many undesirable problems which society will have to deal with in the future. The root of the problem is in the kind of parents we are.

'If we want good children, we have to raise good parents,' says "60 Minutes" Andy Rooney. Governments cannot make good parents — that is not the role of government. We cannot legislate morality.

Neither is the teaching of

values the schools' role. Schools should prepare children to learn how to earn a living while the duty of the home is to teach how one should live a proper life.

The churches and synagogues are where we learn proper parenting. My premise is that our problems are spiritual and moral. Through our religious training, we learn the way to conduct our lives. Through our religious training that we learn the principles of morality.

Alexis de Tocqueville, French political scientist, made a three year tour through the United States in the mid 1800's. He was sent by his government to find out why America became such a great nation in such a short period of time. He found his answer in the churches. As a result of his findings, he wrote a two volume book "Democracy in America."

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"Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions—" de Tocqueville wrote. He said 'America is great because America is good. America will cease to be great only when it ceases to be good,' he said. Here lies the root of Native American problems. Here lies the root of America's dire ills.

The governments role is stated in the Declaration of Independence. It identifies the reasons why the colonists broke away from England, and tells why the new government was formed. It states the government's role is to protect our lives, liberties and properties. Anything more or less is usurpation or oppression. The U.S. Constitution is the instrument formed carrying out the intent of the Declaration of Independence, it should be noted that there is a difference between the role of government and the Constitution. Government was instituted for the purpose of controlling people, while the Constitution is supposed to control government. Thomas Jefferson believed the Constitution is supposed to keep our elected representatives from getting into mischief. It tells what our President, our legislature, and our courts can and cannot do. The intent of

the framers of the Constitution was the three branches of government were designed to balance and check one another. In modern times, our presidents have misused the power of Presidential Orders. The 17th Amendment to the Constitution crippled the proper power of the legislature by doing away with the appointment of the Senators by state legislatures and made Senators an elective position by the people. Before the 17th Amendment, Senators were appointed. Senators were obligated to look after the best interest of their respective states, while, because the representatives were elected by the people from the various states, they were supposed to look after the best interest of the people. These are only a few reasons why our government is no longer serving us properly.

Following are important issues our governments should do to rightfully and effectively assist the citizenry. I also believe that every American, Native and non-Native, should embark upon a serious study of our Constitution and learn what the framers real intent was. Maybe as we do this, we may get a better perspective of what it is that government should do:

1. We must insist that the free enterprise system be allowed to take hold in every faction of American society. Here lies the success of our economy. Government should not interfere. Private enterprise can do things much better and cheaper than government can.

2. To cut the national debt and balance the federal budget, we are going to have to learn the true intent of the "Promote the general welfare" and the "Interstate Commerce" clauses in the Preamble was. The Founding Fathers bitterly debated these clauses before they were included in the Constitution, and cautioned future generations about the dangers of mis-interpretation.

3. The Supreme Court is going to have to interpret the Constitution and avoid the danger of making legislation through its written decisions.

4. The legislature will have

to begin making the laws, based on common sense, rather than listening to special interest groups and lobbyists. The 17th Amendment should be repealed so Senators can gain be appointed by their state legislatures and begin to properly represent their state's best interests.

5. The President is going to have to carry out laws rather than making legislation through his Executive Orders.

6. All the branches of government will have to check and balance one another.

7. The federal government is going to have to stop interfering with states' rights, and let the states serve its citizens. The only time the federal government should interfere is if the issue involves national concerns. States and local governments can best serve from a local level.

8. In the original Constitution, the power to tax was reserved for the states, and the states were obliged to make contributions to the Federal Treasury for road building or national defense. Those best served are those served by those closest to the issue. If people tell you taxes are too high, don't believe it. Government is too big.

We live in a country that is blessed. No other nation has risen to such heights as the United States in such a short period of time — because of the way our Constitution was framed, which dictates to us how government should operate with all its checks and balances.

Native Americans, fought long and hard to be recognized as citizens. We accomplished that through blood, sweat, and tears. We have the Alaska Native Brotherhood to thank. I liken the ANB constitution to the U.S. Constitution in its original form. Article I

says Native people will participate in the civil government from the local, state and national level under the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution and laws of the United States. The way we can attain happiness, which is one of the reasons why our government was set up the way it was, is to participate in government. Our task is to learn all we can about constitutional government and make our contribution to righting wrongs committed against us as citizens. When we do this, we will be helping other people as well.

The Declaration of Independence states the purpose of government is to protect our lives, liberties and properties. It clearly states when government no longer accomplishes these, we are obliged to abolish or alter government and start a new one based on those same principles — that is the protection of our lives, liberties and properties. I don't believe things are so bad that we have to abolish our government just yet — however we can do a lot toward bringing our country back on the right track by altering it and insisting government be put back in its proper constitutional order.

Yes, as Native Americans, we have a lot of problems — but again those problems are not so unusual they are confined just to our Native communities. These are the same problems other ethnic groups and people of the United States are facing, and when we gather as Americans and realize this, we can begin to rightly solve the perplexing afflictions of our U.S. as well.

(Editor's Note: The Yakutat writer submitted the above to the Alaska Native Commission in Ketchikan. The Commission will meet this weekend in Anchorage.)