

## Virginia's Indian Problem

It's not the danger of Indians murdering families on the bloody frontier anymore. That ended before 1800. Virginia's threat is the 'Indian-giver' problem of good intentions and bad policy. Just as Indians gave gifts with the idea of taking them back someday - and wrongfully expected the settlers to understand its okay - well intentioned politicians are going to give and take from all Virginians with 'feel good' legislation. The bill to grant six Virginia Indian tribes Federal Recognition is supposed to be salve for old racial insults. But, Federal Tribe status means the worst of racial politics with a blood census, special privileges based solely on race, a new level of government, and an open door for 'businesses' that are illegal for all other Virginians.

It gets more complicated. Hard core conservative Republicans stand by bleeding heart liberal Democrats supporting the Virginia Indian Bill in the U.S. Congress. Why not? Virginia's Indians are wonderful citizens – good Christians and strong conservatives. They just want a piece of pride. They will get a package of privilege wrapped in the worst kind of racial politics. Virginia needs to find another way to love one another, honor their heritage, and not damage and dishonor the Commonwealth.

Virginia's eastern Indians were labeled either White or Black by segregationist government bureaucrats in the Jim Crow 1920s. The tribes were never recognized by the Federal Government. Recognition today means a new census to determine who is one-eighth Indian. So, the government is going to do precisely what it did in slavery times and segregation – ask people how much of one racial blood they are. Like it really matters.

Virginia's eastern Indians – the tribes in question – began assimilating in 1700. Their descendants are good Virginians and indistinguishable from their neighbors. How can anyone tell that their neighbor is one-eighth Indian? The Tribes got Virginia state recognition in 1983, but that isn't good enough and doesn't come with goodies.

Federal recognition means that someday the Indians can open gambling casinos, even though today's Indian leaders assure it won't happen now. Virginia voters have rejected riverboat gambling by huge margins. This is the back door for gambling – sooner or later.

The day the bill is passed an Indian can open a state and federal 'tax-free' alcohol, tobacco and you-name-it store in Virginia. Read the law. Unfair business advantage, based on race, cheats the governments of taxes everyone else pays.

The six Indian tribes become sovereign governments for local, state and federal governments to contend on every issue of public policy – education, environment, land/water use, law enforcement and development. Virginians rejected regional governments over 2:1 in 1998. A new government, based on race, will rule with real authority.

Educational benefits, based on race, are handed out by the Federal government. Why do Virginia Indians need or want welfare in any form? How is the Indian situation different from their neighbors? Welfare robs dignity.

Since when do Republicans want to increase welfare, expand government, provide special privileges and benefits? How can anyone in good, Conservative conscience support group identity and rights over individual rights? How can any Virginian advocate anything being done as a condition of race and race alone?

Race-based, group rights are repugnant. If Virginia can't get it right today, then

when? How can anyone advocate special rights for eastern Indians – good Virginians since the Revolution – and deny reparations for Blacks? What moral reasoning works here, except to reject race-based identity and group rights?

Virginians should tell their Congressional delegation to vote ‘No’ to race-based public policy. It’s right hearted and wrong headed to the extreme. The Indians should be honored for their heritage but not awarded anything for the accident of race by birth. My wife is one-sixteenth Indian (wrong tribe) and she, her mother (1/8<sup>th</sup>), and grandmother (1/4<sup>th</sup>) never deserved, expected nor wanted special privileges based on their birth. They earned their way in life – just like everybody else. Let’s keep it that way.

Virginia, the cradle of representative democracy, has a destiny leading the Nation to a color blind future. Reject our color bound past. Don’t take race-based policies one step further into our common future.

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