

WEST RIVER EAGLE

Over 48 Hours, no legal action from Governor Noem over checkpoint ultimatum

Alaina Beautiful Bald Eagle on May 11, 2020

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Fran Carr



It has been over 48 hours since Governor Kristi Noem issued an ultimatum to the Cheyenne River Sioux and Oglala Sioux Tribes to remove their public health checkpoints or face legal action. During her press conference today, the governor said she will be pursuing legal action “so we can get some clarity on moving forward”, but did not say when.

When asked if the State’s request for unobstructed access through Reservation lands on Federal, State, and Tribal roads meant there could not be any checkpoints, Noem replied, “What we really need to see happen, is that we need people that are just driving through the area to be able to do so. We need to be able to get the property owners to their property, ranchers to their cattle. We need to let essential services through the area. Allow road crews to come in and do maintenance were available. And we have to allow emergency services to come through. So all of that — those deliveries of gas, medical supplies and food — are

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The governor said the decision to issue letters to both Tribes came after she received complaints about the checkpoints.

“I am getting reports from travelers, from businesses from the area, ranchers in the area and those from DOT and other state agencies that these checkpoints have been an issue with allowing those types of services to get through,” said the governor.

Noem also said that she heard stories that emergency and essential services are not able to get through the checkpoints but declined to give any specific incidents that have occurred.

When asked if she would cease to object to checkpoints when given confirmation that essential services would be allowed through, Noem said, “I don’t think checkpoints are a good idea on State and Federal highways. I’ve indicated to the Tribes...that it would be important for them to know there’s a difference between those highways and BIA roads, and that we need to continue to work to find a resolution that makes sure that our laws are upheld, and that we’re allowing those essential services to go through.”

The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe maintains that essential businesses, commercial and delivery vehicles are not turned around, and that medical services are not impeded.

In fact, ranching and farming are essential businesses, and both tribal and non-tribal members can apply for essential travel permits, said CRST Intergovernmental Affairs Coordinator Remi Bald Eagle.

The Tribe is continuing with their checkpoints and said they will continue to do so as long as COVID-19 pandemic threatens the health of all residents living on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation.

“Everything is operating normally and we expect them to continue to operate normally,” said CRST tribal Chairman Harold Frazier.

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