



## **Editorial, 1/17: County decision fails Whiteclay**

By the Journal Star editorial board

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Last week, Sheridan County Commissioners could have done the right thing and denied the reissue of liquor licenses to the four beer stores of Whiteclay.

Instead, after just 10 minutes of discussion, the commission voted 3-0 to recommend reissuing licenses to the stores in the remote village with a population of 12 that, year after year, have been allowed to sell the equivalent of 3.5 million cans of beer. Most of the sales are to residents of the legally dry Pine Ridge Indian Reservation just across the South Dakota border.

The reservation, home to the Oglala Sioux Tribe, is plagued with alcoholism, crime, poverty and fetal alcohol syndrome -- all exacerbated by the easy availability of alcohol in Whiteclay. Shutting the stores down by denying the liquor licenses wouldn't end those problems, but it would likely reduce them.

But the commission sided with those who argued that solving those problems is the responsibility of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and only the tribe. To wit: "I hope the tribe and the people that have the authority to help themselves will step up to the plate and deal with alcoholism," Commissioner Loren Paul told the Journal Star. "Alcoholism is the problem, not the supply."

To be sure, the tribe needs to and has tried to address alcoholism and related problems on the reservation, but arguing that prohibition in Whiteclay would not be a step forward toward a solution is reprehensible.

In making their decision, the commissioners also ignored indisputable evidence that adequate law enforcement is absent in Whiteclay, where there has been a handful of unsolved deaths in recent years. Instead, they argued that county taxpayers shouldn't be required to pick up the tab for more and better policing.

The Whiteclay liquor license renewal process now moves to the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission, which will hold hearings of its own, most likely in March, and make the final decision on whether to renew the licenses.

The Liquor Control Commission should do the right thing, what Sheridan County refused to do: Deny the licenses, shut down the stores and cut off the easy flow of alcohol onto the reservation.