



THE TRUTH WELL TOLD

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## Veteran urges BIA to revisit procedures

By Vida Volkert  
Staff writer  
eastnavajo@gallupindependent.com

**CROWNPOINT** — A veteran from Crownpoint who has been trying to hook his home to the grid for eight years is still struggling in the dark.

Jim Smiley, 64, has not been able to connect the home he built on his family allotment in the Crownpoint area eight years ago because the Bureau of Indian Affairs requires more than 100 signatures from Navajo tribal members with rights to the same allotment. They are required to approve a right of way to grant the local utility company authorization to run a power line to Smiley's home. Smiley has tried to contact the individuals on the list, but some are no longer alive, others have moved away and some are refusing to approve authorization.

"Smiley's residence is about 360 feet from a CDEC primary distribution line," Continental Divide Electric Cooperative member service manager Mac Juarez Jr. wrote earlier this year in an email to the Independent. "If he is able to provide CDEC with an approved (residential) lease, and following the process and regulations of the Navajo Land Department, it would appear CDEC could provide service through a service-line agreement."

Continental Divide and the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority have made it clear that the companies would not serve homes on tribal land that lack either a home site lease or a residential lease because that is a requirement established by the Bureau of Indian Affairs to build a

home or bring infrastructure to a residence.

This requirement is one of the reasons about 15,000 families on the Navajo Nation lack electricity, according to NTUA authorities.

Meanwhile, Smiley has requested assistance from Gallup Solar and NTUA to set up a solar system at his home. Winter is coming, and the veteran has been struggling to crank up an old generator to light up the house, he said.

Gallup Solar offered to give Smiley a solar panel for free and quoted him about \$3,000 to install it.

On an \$1,800 monthly income, the veteran does not have \$3,000 to pay up front, he said.

"I'm not begging for money," he said. "I just need a hand. I just want power. I just want a normal life."

NTUA spokeswoman Deenise Becenti reported a renewable energy technician visited Smiley's home earlier this year, inspected it and reported back that the home was not up to the safety code.

Becenti reported Monday that NTUA is waiting for Smiley to return an application to request solar service and for an affidavit from a certified electrician attesting that Smiley's place has been rewired to meet the safety code before the Navajo enterprise can install a solar panel.

"Jim here. There's no electrician, no BIA, no home site lease, no Gallup Solar, no NTUA, nothing," the frustrated veteran wrote in a text message to the Independent Friday.

He also wrote, "I urge BIA to revisit their senseless procedures," in a handwritten note to the BIA Aug. 29, which he shared with the Independent.