

TRIBAL-STATE RELATIONS

By
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Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
North Dakota House of Representatives Chamber, State Capitol
Bismarck, North Dakota
January 5, 1995
As printed in the House Journal

The Common Man Singers, Earl Bullhead, Dana Yellow Fat, Courtney Yellow Fat, Ken Billingsly and Tom Bullhead presented the Flag Song.

Thank you very much. The Common Man Singers from Standing Rock singing group is made up of Mr. Earl Bullhead, Mr. Courtney Yellow Fat, Mr. Oscar Standing Crow, Mr. Dana Yellow Fat, Mr. Tom Bullhead, and a councilman on our tribal government, Mr. Ken Billingsly.

Once again, it is with great honor that I stand before you this beautiful day. Let me begin my comments by saying thank you to the clergy who offered the prayer that our creator has given to us.

What I will be sharing with you simply is what has been told to us as young men, as young women, on our respective reservations – what has been reiterated to us time and time again as generations pass. Our reservation, Standing Rock Reservation, is located in both states of South and North Dakota. I don't know how inappropriate this may sound or seem to be; I am a resident of the state of South Dakota but have been asked by my people to lead them as the tribal chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. So, I don't know how uncomfortable that may make some of you feel, but it is indeed a great honor to be in front of you today.

I will begin by sharing with you what has been told to us, as I have said earlier, by many of our people and that is something that is called in our English language: respect. As I have exemplified to you, our people have succumbed and have been exposed to many instances and circumstances where things were taken from us, continuously taken from us, time and time again. And we know that as we give, we shall receive. And as we know that when we believe, we shall see. And that is what is occurring throughout Indian Country, not only in North Dakota, but throughout this great land called the United States of America. We are now seeing what has been prophesied by our elders, some who are a long time gone. I will begin by what they have told us and what we are simply reiterating and expounding upon in the English language.

The treaties established our reservations throughout Indian Country. There are many definitions of treaties, but if you look at the simpler ones, they are agreements between two states or sovereigns. Indeed, we have treaties that established many of our reservations. One of the definitions of treaties is that they are the supreme law of this great nation of the United States. So as we look at treaties and reexamine them, and take care of those sacred documents, we ponder the time when they were negotiated, where, on one side of the table, you saw a group of people who could neither read nor speak the English language. On the other side, of course, you had representatives of the United States of America. And yet, through some common bonding, through some common understanding, agreement was made and the treaties were signed and ratified. But what is most interesting is that one side could not understand or read the English language.

Even more interesting today, in 1995, those treaties are still the law of the land. What type of common ground, what type of common bonding was set so these treaties are still in existence? It has led us to view treaties as sacred documents because if we were to attempt that today we know how difficult that would be.

As you begin your session this afternoon, I think each of us in our own way can realize what that common bonding was. So, the treaties are being examined by our people now as they have been in the past. And it is that common ground and common bonding where we will continue to enhance these documents.

Now, many of the states, many residents of the states throughout the country, feel that Indian people, the Indian reservations, are getting something for free when we take a look at health care, when we take a look at education. But, if you take a look at what is outlined in the treaties, we are barely getting what is guaranteed to us, what was agreed to with us by the United States of America, particularly as we see the cuts in the Indian health service. So, it is not things that we are getting for free. These are agreements that were made between our people as a nation with the United States of America. So, they are indeed very sacred documents.

As you take a look at the history of our peoples throughout North America, you will be able to find that we went through a reservation period; we went through an assimilation period; we went through a termination period; we went through a relocation period to where we are at today -- self-determination, self-direction era.

Keep in mind that it isn't us who were taking things all the time. It is we who were having things taken from us, continuously, continuously. But as has been told to us, prophesied to us, that in seven generations what has been taken from you, shall return. We see that unveiling in front of us throughout Indian country.

We are very hopeful, we are very optimistic as we work with our counterparts, whether they are leaders such as yourself to represent your people throughout the state of North Dakota and of course representing us as American Indians, or whether we work with the congressional people, who represent us in Washington, D.C. We're very optimistic that this understanding of what we have experienced as American Indian people will be understood in its simplicity.

When we take a look at all of those eras, it's very interesting...to find that it was not until 1924 that our people were allowed citizenship into the United States of America. What is even more interesting, when we take a look at the wars that this great country has fought in, is the participation of American Indian warriors and American Indian women – how, by ethnic groups, they represented this country, how they fought for this country, how much reverence we have for this flag. A lot of sacrifices were made.

As we take a look at that time of 1924, we know that the First World War occurred from 1914 to 1918. So you see the type of beautiful history that has been shared with us, has been exemplified, and shown to us by our people. For starters, we take a look at what has happened through time. Even though there were federal policies at the turn of the century that prohibited the speaking of our Native languages, you see that coming to the forefront with many of our young people with the movements in education. So, we are trying to unravel and are unraveling many of the suppressive and oppressive acts that were placed on many of our people.

By far, what is more interesting is what happened in 1978, on August 11, when the United States government said it was okay for Indian people to practice their religious forms of belief – something that was in the First Amendment of our Constitution, guaranteeing that right to everybody. We were allowed to do that, some fifty years ago. And it's because of that we see all of the beautiful developments happening for us and with us and by us throughout Indian Country. But imperative through all of this are the treaties and how we take a look at those. Again, bear in mind that it is us who had things taken from us.

We see the redefining of education throughout Indian country. We understand what education means, what it can do, what it has done, and what it will do for us and how very important it is for us. But, we also see the need to redefine this throughout Indian Country. As we are involved in this process, we see the importance of our language. We respect and know how languages foreign to us must be part of the curriculums throughout America. But, if you take a look at our situation, the English language is the foreign language. As we try to capture, as we try to relearn, we are now going to be relearning our various languages. We are simply asking, in this instance of education, the development of different reciprocity agreements, so that the states, the schools, the education leaders will be able to understand how important it is for our children, our youth, to learn our language. Because it is with that language that we

can couple what is in our mind and what comes in our heart. So when I say my friends and my relatives, it will have a very profound and unique meaning as we develop and redevelop our form of communication.

As we take a look at the Indian college movement throughout Indian Country, whatever it is they bring to the table for you to assist them with, you will be able to understand the uniqueness of our people and how we can understand what is going on now currently in education terms in America and how we are developing these different issues I touched upon: language, culture. Things are going to be practical and useful for us on Standing Rock, Fort Berthold, Belcourt, and Devils Lake. So as they come to the table, this is what they are bringing – not to be the exception, not to be the oddball, but simply to be understood. So as you hear and deal with the different issues involving education, listen to what the American Indian colleges are bringing to you for consideration. Basically, they are saying: “Look, we’ve got very minimal resources but we are making huge advancements and huge strides in American Indian education through the college movement.”

Economic development throughout Indian country is on an upswing, but bear in mind, we are just now catching up with decades upon decades of suppression and depression. You can find that in some of the facts that relate to all of us within the last five years. Sioux County in North Dakota was one of the ten poorest counties in the United States of America. In the United States of America we had one of the ten poorest counties. As we make advances in economic development, our definition economic development may not be exactly what it is for residents in other counties throughout the state. Also, economic development is going to be viewed and perceived and approached differently throughout Indian country. Yes, we know how to compete but it’s also important to keep in mind that we are just now catching up from decades and decades of having things taken from us. We know the potential of what the dollar can bring but we haven’t been given an opportunity to realize that. We haven’t been given an opportunity to set our own regulations. They have been set for us in a situation of paternalism, where we are always being told what to do. So it is very exciting for us in Indian Country as we look at economic development and social programs.

We are very grateful for the social development that has been occurring throughout Indian Country. We’re grateful for the opportunities that this state has given us on Standing Rock as we develop a Children’s Coordinating Services Committee. We are able to benefit from some of the dollars to address the alcoholism problems on our reservation, the tribal-state court forums. We’re very grateful for those opportunities and others that I won’t mention. We’re grateful for other opportunities that are going to be coming to us in a development of social programs on our reservations, because I know economic and social development have to go hand-in-hand. They have to be ongoing simultaneously because if they are not, you can have the most beautiful buildings in any community, but if we don’t have the healthy people, all of it won’t be realized and vice versa. You can have the healthiest people, but if we don’t have the resources, you can’t truly realize the advancements we’ve made socially. So we are encouraged, we are very optimistic about this ongoing relationship with the state of North Dakota, bearing in mind that we know that we wear two hats. We can wear the hat as far as being a citizen of North Dakota and the hat that is given to us through the treaties.

Lastly, we are most encouraged about the opportunity that is coming to us shortly, wherein we from Standing Rock will be able to sign an accord, establishing a true government relationship with the state of North Dakota and its governor. That accord will neither diminish nor enhance any of us, but simply sets the stage for us as we continue to work as governments on a government-to-government relationship. I am particularly encouraged by it because any time we sit down to work with governmental agencies in the state of North Dakota, they have shared with me the concern and question as to whether or not we are giving up any jurisdiction or giving up any sovereignty. We hope that this accord will address that so we can sit down and get into some of the agreements, some of the working relationships and build upon those in the future, be it through education or otherwise.

But once again, as you will hear all of the testimonies given your respective committees by our Indian people throughout North Dakota, if you can keep in mind that we are also working with our own government issues back home. The state government issues, the federal government issues - very

complex sometimes, very frustrating sometimes. But, we made those assurances and guarantees to our elders and we know how important it is for our youth to continue that.

We have always been open to working with anybody and everybody and we would like to continue that. It is with that spirit, my friends and my relatives, that I stand before you today, again saying thank you for this opportunity to address you this great day, this nice, warm day – I'll say for North Dakota. And close by saying thank you very much for this opportunity.

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