

STATE OF THE RELATIONSHIP ADDRESS

Richard LaFromboise, Chairman
Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa
North Dakota House of Representatives Chamber, State Capitol
Bismarck, North Dakota
January 7, 1999
As printed in the House Journal

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Lemieux, Mr. Boucher, members of the House, fellow tribal people, councilmen, and supporters.

Hello, how are you? Great Spirit, thank you. Thank you, Great Spirit, for giving us the courage, the opportunity, the wisdom, and the fortuitousness to still be alive, to be able to talk to you today as a Native American. To you, the rest of the state of North Dakota, welcome, welcome to our land. Let's start beginning today a new era, a new millennium.

We talk about our history as Native Americans sharing with you our land, our home. And yes, Mr. Sergeant-at-Arms, it would really be nice if we were the bank and not the band. The history of our great state of North Dakota has a lot to be proudful for. It has been great for a lot of us. It raised a bunch of beautiful human beings that are respected worldwide for their workability, for their perseverance, and for their good humor. The Turtle Mountain Chippewa, my heritage, contributed to this state in the form of giving to you the northeast corner of this state, some 10 million acres of land, and in return we talked to your grandfathers and their grandfathers and we had an agreement. Our agreement was that you would live in safety, harmony, and participation and for that and for us being put off in a small corner of this world, 6 miles by 12 miles, we were to be able to receive from the United States government with their honor health, education, and welfare for our youth, our families, and for our growing old. The United States government developed policies that began with extermination, reservation, assimilation. Some of these words don't mean much to you; they mean a lot to us. It is almost like being regulated like our fellow farmers have.

Whenever there is a good feeling in some legislator's mind, whether it be a federal legislator or a state legislator, they come up with an idea on how to fix the problem and we the people that are affected by it feel its wrath or its happiness. In a lot of instances in this growing modern society we have seen a lot of clinkers thrown in. At today's day and age we call ourselves in the area of self-sufficiency, self-governments. Tribal leaders like myself have had the opportunity of learning in your schools and institutions be us lawyers, doctors, and whatnot as contributors to our society.

The state of North Dakota must be complimented for some of its wisdom other than sending George Armstrong Custer off to Montana in 1876. The wisdom of our North Dakotans in developing an Indian Affairs Commission in 1949 developed a sure way of doing state and tribal relations. With the ending of an era and the beginning of a new millennium, it is time to review the past, to heal and forgive, and to enter into a new phase of state-tribal relationships. We have to become government to government, friend to friend, brother to brother, sister to sister, and enter into a commitment that the tribal governments have the same and similar capabilities of the state governments. That those governments have entered into accords. The tribe, the Fort Yates Indian Tribe, who I hope I am speaking partially for today, have entered into two negotiations within the last couple of years. One is to develop a tax collection in the area of gasoline and in cigarettes. Hopefully, that accord between the state and that tribe will develop some good positive activity especially in the area of education. The Turtle Mountain Tribe has also signed an accord with the state. That means--an accord means--we need to get along. It also means that we agree to disagree. It is just like Mr. Dorso and Mr. Boucher, one may be a republican and one may be a democrat but they both are North Dakotans. They agree and disagree for the state of North Dakota.

We as Native Americans, however, have been perceived I believe in a lot of eras and areas, incorrectly. There is a perception that the federal government has the responsibility and there is a great pot of money

out there that takes care of our needs. That is totally false. It is totally untrue. That would be the same thing as saying the farmers are all taken care of because the federal government provides for them with CRPs and all these other things in what we call the largest welfare checks in the country. We need to take a look at what has happened to us as Indians. With the new movement of government in downsizing, with the cutting back of different budgets, the bean counters, as we call them, the accountants, because cash flow does not work properly, have actually slashed lives and participation of good human beings for our future. An example is the Indian Health Service. Everybody says, "Well, Indians have free health." It is not true. Indian Health Service provides approximately \$1,132 per Native American whereas the American economy in just you, Representative Niemeier, in District 20; you as an average American citizen receive \$3,261 in our federal budget. The perception that we as Indians have all the gambling money in the world--that's a total false situation. If you would ever come to Turtle Mountain where 25 percent of the welfare families in the state of North Dakota live--twenty-five percent, ladies and gentlemen, live in my district--in District 9. We, however, as Indians have worked hard in taking advantage of some federal perceptions and thanking our previous Governor Sinner. Sitting down and letting me teach him how to play poker because he, being a previous what-do-you-call-it, family man and non-gambling individual, did not know how to give it a raise or another raise and we talked about that and put together a compact. It was a gaming compact and at that point we started some gaming in the state of North Dakota.

I just read recently where Minot Magic City fund gave \$3 million to some company out of Minneapolis to start some type of technology, while us poor, trudging-type Indians--five tribes in North Dakota--started with nothing ladies and gentlemen. Nothing. We started and today we have 2500 of our state's citizens working--2500 equating to about \$40 million worth of payroll that goes into the cities and the reservation nearby towns. One-fifth of those employees are non-Natives--farmers' wives, friends of farmers' wives in local areas in where we have had some help. We need to say that we do contribute to our great state. We have a young population of Native Americans. Our average youthful age is about 18. The average age of the non-Indian is somewhere around 32. We feel that the sadness is that we are not providing that opportunity for all of us to stay here and to contribute to our great state. We need to enhance our socio and economic plights. The Turtle Mountain Tribe, which I am most familiar with because I have been there since 1982 off and on and had the opportunity of talking to you for the first time when we started this activity, there has been some change and very positive. The economic enhancement has really progressed not just through gaming but through the high tech. We at Turtle Mountain have a company called Univan. It deals with government contracts, and some of you are experiencing it in front of you. The rest of you that have the books and stuff yet will someday eventually move to that high tech, pushing the button in front of you, being able to be linked to the Internet and the rest of the world.

There is a commercial on TV that has a phone ringing to another gentleman and says: "Oh where?" He wants to come out here. "Come out here, we got to show you something." The guy drives out and he is way out in the middle of the desert. He says, "What did you bring me way out here in no man's land for?" He says, "Hey, it's \$2.25 a square foot, what do you think?" At \$2.25 a square foot that equates in our high tech operations as what's our overhead. High tech is that we can link that computer from Mr. Boucher's office right in front of him to the Turtle Mountain Tribe about 200 miles north and we do not need to drive back and forth. We need to just push the button back and forth and we are linked.

North Dakota is in an era that where if we work together we can accomplish a number of things. We can accomplish better water management in our state. We do not have to worry about what the Indians have and the non-Indians don't have. We can solve the problems around Devils Lake; we can solve the problems around Garrison; we can solve the problems around Oahe; we can solve the problems up in the Turtle Mountain and Shell Valley areas, but we need to do it together. We can solve the problems in law enforcement because we have a cooperative agreement between our county officers and our tribal officers. The old concept of he is an Indian and he is different needs to be thrown out the door. The old concept of he is a Norwegian and you tell nasty jokes about him--it's ok. That's got to be thrown out the door. The idea that disaster management needs to be dealt with amongst all of us. Tribal governments should be recognized, ladies and gentlemen, as units of government not as secondhand used stores. We need to talk about our social health and programming for our services. The social health in North Dakota

with this new welfare-to-work concept that people who are on welfare only have 60 months. It is going to be a great devastating impact to us poor people, to the counties that are poor in your state, and they are namely the Native American ones. If we work together, ladies and gentlemen--if we work together--we can train our poor people just as well as rich people. We can train them in jobs having high tech or not. We can spend the time together and the money together to develop jobs because that's the problem. We don't have the jobs but we can create them. We need to have a fair shake of the dollars to administer those programs. Hopefully, both sides of the aisle will come to the conclusion that if Turtle Mountain has 25 percent of the problem which everybody says is the problem, welfare, then Turtle Mountain should get 25 percent of the dollars to cure it, and now that we are into the block-grant concept of federal government down to the state, those administrative dollars should follow the activity. I think, ladies and gentlemen, it is not a matter of hoarding dollars; it is a matter of creating opportunity. See, sometimes I think our North Dakota thoughts and concepts take second place to what some personal feelings are.

You know, my old grandfather used to say and I think your grandfathers used to say because I heard Dorso say it the other day, "A bird in the hand is worth two in a bush." By gosh, if you have the bird in the hand, let's deal with that. That old concept let's work it out, let's clean it up. If it ain't broke, don't fix it. In other words, are we here to create bills and problems or are we here to work out things or programs at home and the people like me that are affected by it? Because I am a North Dakota citizen, ladies and gentlemen. I pay federal taxes. Every one of my Indian people on the reservations in North Dakota pay federal taxes--if we have a job. If we don't live on the reservation, we pay state taxes. We pay cigarette taxes, we pay gas taxes. We contribute. There's a misconception by a lot of people out there. We compliment the state of North Dakota in another area. There has been some wisdom somewhere in these Capitol grounds of creating liaisons in different departments, and if we are going to truly be having our accord, the accord between state and state or government and government providing professional information from one side of the aisle to the other, we need professional people. We don't need hacks that have perceptions that are not right. We need professional people on your side of the aisle and our side of the aisle.

At the present time Turtle Mountain is proud to announce that on the desk of Vice President Gore is a package called the EZ zone. It was a package done by the Turtle Mountain Tribe and the surrounding community, actually District 9, and we're one of 10 packets sitting there that if it is approved, we will be able to develop some economic spin in the state of North Dakota to the tune of approximately \$2 million to \$10 million a year creating jobs and developing things. If you know anybody that knows anybody up on the hill, I mean Capitol Hill, please give them a call.

We are talking about creating 3,000 jobs, ladies and gentlemen, 3,000 jobs! That's a lot of jobs. If we have 2,500 jobs in the gaming business today in North Dakota in our five tribes and creating \$40 million to the industry that we have here, we are also creating about \$28 million in supplies that are necessary to keep these vendors going. I haven't heard of any non-Indian going to one of our places and getting scalped. They may have lost a few bucks, but they didn't get scalped.

We think just like you guys. Although our skin in some places may be a little tanner, you know, because we were out in the prairie a little longer than you, but the bottom line is we're the same. We bleed the same, the blood is red. We are talking about jobs--jobs that create activities and opportunities to our people. Not only do we or are we involved with what is called the EZ zone, we have also created another activity that none of you probably even have been watching. We have been involved with what is called the HUB zone, a historically underutilized business area in our country. The Turtle Mountain Tribe and the other tribes have backed it up. What we've come to and had as a result is that every American Indian tribe in the country that means all five reservations, are historically underutilized business areas. We are eligible for federal contracts that have been given to people around the beltway in Washington, DC, for years and years and years. Hopefully, we can get that out into rural America--maybe some of the high tech things such as setting up computer systems, doing data entry. Turtle Mountain does data entry for the Internal Revenue Service, does data entry for the immigrations, people that go and come from our country. We do the fish and game reports for you for the state of North Dakota. Everybody that fills out a little piece of credit card or paper. We should keep that business in North Dakota.

We worked with our high schools. We worked with our school systems. We have started accumulating and assimilating a very good scenario for all of us. We want to be able to be trained from the day that you hit Head Start until the time you get your four-year degree that there is an equal opportunity in the state of North Dakota. We have participated as Native American tribes to work with the state of North Dakota and we want to thank your department of education for having some type of a keen forward thinking concept of how do we wipe out and get rid of ignorance? We get rid of ignorance by our number one objective for our youth, and since Turtle Mountain has for its greatest resources its people, we need to do number one – we need to educate people. So what we've done is we've helped the state of North Dakota and we put together an assimilation of information that each one of you as legislators should have. It's a book on the history and the culture of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. It's a collaboration between the state department of education and it should be shared with our kids so that we can help wipe out ignorance. We have the history and culture of the Standing Rock Tribe, we have the history and culture of the Spirit Lake Nation, and at the present time the one on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation is being in print. The state of North Dakota had the wisdom in 1973 of creating a scholarship program for Native Americans, but I think that we also have had a little run-in here and there about how can we best cooperate activities. Our community colleges are north centrally accredited. Just like the community colleges in the state of North Dakota. I remember you guys having a little twist on the session there a time or two ago about whether the constitutional change that takes place or not and take some names off or whatever, but the thing is we are all north centrally accredited. We educate non-Indians in our community colleges. At the United Tribes Training Center we are educating non-Indians from this community in the trades areas--vocational. But guess what; we are not receiving scholarship dollars from the state to help those non-Natives get an education. We need to look at that again. Hopefully, a bill will be produced that will show that there is a fairness and an equity between two aisles.

We need to take a look at the future of our state in the area of housing and housing finance. If I can make \$50,000 or \$60,000 a year and I can do that for 25 or 30 years just like everybody else in here can, then I should be able to walk into a housing finance place and get my house financed if I want to build one. But if I want to build one on my homeland which happens to be up on a reservation, it's pretty rough. We need to do something about that. We need to get rid of those impediments. It is not an impediment of my ability to pay, it is an impediment because of the color of my skin. We need to get right down to the earth of it.

The gaming compacts--and I know I saw you guys' comments in the paper, some of you about gambling and gaming--and let's not take it personal. Let's talk about it as a business at the present time for the state of North Dakota. I think that it's not the answer or the panacea to all our problems in native country right now, but there has been a pretty good jump start in the last 5 to 10 years to putting together some type of a self-governance. It's not going to last. I believe just like you do that it's a cyclical thing. If I were a betting man, as they would say, and I were to give Doug Lemieux a chance to fly from Chicago in an airstream jet to fly into Turtle Mountain--even if I had a nice beautiful runway out there--and whether he was going to go to Las Vegas, you know what he would do. He would put that jet in overdrive and he would shag for Las Vegas. That's only reality. It's the people that have the backward way of thinking that say, well; it's bad we don't want to do it. It's not a matter of bad; it's a matter of what is good for the business at the present time. We need right now, because of this welfare reform and the potential for job creation, a window of opportunity. We've been discussing this with the Governor and hopefully he will come to some type of definitive conclusion and we can move on with business. It's not a matter of our old moralist background coming up and God bless all of us in North Dakota because I think that we do have a conservative view on that matter. We in Indian country also have those conservative views but we have to take our personal pride and issue out of it and talk about it as a business. If we don't take advantage of this opportunity at the present time, it is not going to be there again.

Tourism in North Dakota needs to be enhanced. I think we have a pretty good drawing card for North Dakota. We have some pretty good Indian people. Those people out in the east they still think we live in teepees, you know. They are really surprised when they all drive out here. We need to get a more streamlined movement of those people from the east to come and see us, to be able to spend some time with us, to be able to enjoy the beautiful scenery of North Dakota. With the Sakakawea and the 1804

expedition coming pretty close to our 100th celebration, we should be spending some of our North Dakota dollars in conjunction with tribal dollars to do something about it. We should be talking about gathering together in the year 2000 giving thanks to the Great Spirit, the Good Lord, for giving health, giving life, giving us prosperity in the state of North Dakota. Even though right now everybody is saying farm prices are down, not worth it to raise hogs--you know--I was talking to an old man just the other day and he said, "Jiggers it's just good to be alive."

So hopefully today I have brought you a little spirit of goodness, positiveness, and I hope that we can help work together to eradicate the ignorance by our education. We have to rely on some of our Indian professionals to do that and we have to rely on professionals on your side of the aisle, and your side of the aisle to come to some positive conclusions.

In closing, I guess I would like to share with you some of the things that we as Native Americans appreciate. We appreciate North Dakotans because they talk like those people in Fargo sometimes--that movie Fargo--them guys, those guys, yup, me too, ya know. We like our North Dakotans. We like those Canadians too--aay. They come down and they give some economy to us. But I as a Turtle Mountain Chippewa, I appreciate my Sioux friends -- the ones that are south down by Fort Yates and Fort Totten. We are always giving each other a bad time, especially the guys at Fort Totten because there is a lot of intermarriage there. And sometimes it's very confusing when the young boy is brought out for the first hunt. He doesn't know whether to shoot the dog or the rabbit. He starts crying and it's very confusing. But I can say that--I can say that and a Norwegian can tell a Norwegian joke and a German can tell a German joke, but when we talk about another group of people in a condescending manner using them as "mascots" it's a demeaning movement that I think all of us human beings in this room are going to deal with, hopefully, in a positive manner and giving ourselves some time to change it. No insult to my friends that have graduated from the University of North Dakota, but Fighting Sioux is a demeaning matter to my Sioux friends. I would hope that you know we as human beings can walk together as friends and, what the heck, Jesse "the Body" Ventura is the Governor of Minnesota. Maybe in two years you might see a tribal chairman from Turtle Mountain sitting up doing the state of the union address instead of the state of the tribal relations between Indian and state. One thing for sure, I will take him on. I ain't afraid of him. That would be a good fight. Indian, and what is he? What's his nationality? But that's the way and that's the attitude we as North Dakotans need to do. Work on a positive movement. Turtle Mountain--give you a little history since I've been there--came home a young educated man working with our people, working with these guys up here with some good information, and some good, what I would call positive, movement started in 1982 with a \$17 million pass-through through our reservation. I will tell, ladies and gentlemen, it was a pass-through because if it come into the reservation it sieved right out. 1997-98 we had over \$220 million worth of activity in District 9. In 15 years we built an economy that could support probably the northeastern corner of the state of North Dakota. That's why we have a growing population and hopefully we can show by example that we all can do it if we work harder together.

Thank you very much.

<><><><><>