

State of the Tribal-State Relationship

Honorable Charles W. Murphy, Chairman
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe
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Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, House Majority Leader Rick Berg, Senate Majority Leader Bob Stenehjem, House Minority Leader Merle Boucher, Senate Minority Leader David O'Connell, Governor John Hoeven, Lt. Governor Jack Dalrymple, members of the North Dakota State Legislature, Tribal leaders, Tribal citizens, North Dakota citizens, and distinguished guests.

Thank you for inviting me to speak before a joint session of the North Dakota Legislature.

The Tribal Nations of North Dakota want to recognize all of the veterans that are in the audience today, veterans of my tribe, and all of our brave soldiers serving throughout the world, specifically in Iraq, who are protecting our precious freedoms. I am proud and humbled to be a Vietnam Veteran myself. Your sacrifices and your family sacrifices will never be forgotten by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and all Tribal Nations.

In addition, I would like to give our sincere condolences to the families of the victims of the tragic Tsunami that hit islands and shores from the Indian Subcontinent to Africa. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe is proud of the way America has reacted to this historic act of Mother Nature. I also want to thank the Sinte'-Ska drum group that sang the honor song and the Standing Rock Vietnam Veterans Association Color Guard. Thank you for bringing our culture into this important event.

This is now the 11th time a Tribal Chairperson has stood before you and delivered an address called the "State of the Tribal-State Relationship." This began 20 years ago in 1985. Today I'm speaking on behalf of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe. What I say here today reflects my thoughts.

Plenty has happened between the Tribal Nations in North Dakota and the State of North Dakota in the past 20 years, and I believe most has been good.

Further, I believe that because of our work together we have learned how to cooperate with one another in many different areas.

That's really the theme of this address - tribal-state cooperation.

Let me give you some examples:

Together, with the Legislature and the Governor, in 1992, and again through negotiations in 1999, we worked out a Tribal-gaming compact that provides Tribal members with jobs, income, and a sense of pride and accomplishment. We review our compact every two years with the legislative leaders and the Governor. We believe this process has worked for both the members of my Tribe and the citizens of North Dakota. This cooperation has led to more than 2,000 full-time jobs in isolated, rural areas of North Dakota, where the previous unemployment rates on the reservation were as high as 75 percent.

Not only does our casino provide jobs, it takes people off welfare. As studies have shown, approximately 40 percent of our current casino employees were former recipients of welfare.

At the same time, it makes a significant economic impact on our local economy and the surrounding region. The five tribal casinos located in the State of North Dakota purchase over \$40 million annually in goods and services. These purchases are made in 93 communities within the state. I invite all of you to come and visit our Prairie Knights Casino, entertainment center, lodge, and marina, when water levels permit. We're always thankful for your patronage.

I know that's a shameless plug for our casino, but the point is, that we have an economic engine- tourism- that never existed before, because of cooperation with the State of North Dakota.

Our Tribe has also signed with the State of North Dakota a "Tribal-State accord" that recognizes our government-to-government relationship with North Dakota, which is based on treaties and federal law. Out of that effort came the agreement regarding collection of motor fuel taxes.

More recently, the members of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe have suffered first through a devastating prairie fire that destroyed the entire community of Shields and then the loss of water to 10,000 people in Sioux County because of low water levels on Lake Oahe. The State of North Dakota, and Governor Hoeven, were right there on the scene in both cases with help. In fact, the Governor himself is responsible for helping to save a home north of Fort Yates from the prairie fire in 2002. While touring by helicopter, the Governor noticed an unprotected home in the path of the fire. He had his chopper land and made contact with another Guard helicopter that brought in water to help douse the fire from the air, saving the home.

Governor, the members of my Tribe are very grateful. You were there on the fire line, you were there when the water ran out in Fort Yates, and I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank you again for all you've done.

Respectful cooperation is exactly the kind of good thing we can build on to make our relationship even stronger.

We know that through our cooperation we can ensure a clean, safe, and dependable water supply, not only for our Tribal members, but also for all citizens of North Dakota who depend on water coming from Lake Oahe and for that matter, Lake Sakakawea. Communities from Parshall through Garrison on to Fort Yates have greatly suffered. This must not happen again.

We need to work together, State and Tribes, in a lawsuit, if necessary, to make sure that all of our citizens are never again left high and dry without water because of the actions of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

I also want to thank the Legislature and the Governor for their help in restoring federal funding for United Tribes Technical College. Education is important to all of us. This funding is vital. We have a growing population of young people, who otherwise would have no chance for a first-rate vocational and technical education. As Chairman of the Board at United Tribes, I know how important our relationship with the State of North Dakota has been and will continue to be.

Our enrollment is on the increase. We are launching efforts to gain additional support in the private sector.

We have a strategic plan for expanding the campus which will help us provide more services and educate more students. I would like to introduce a U.T.T.C. student we are proud of. Jason Pretty Boy is from Standing Rock. He's a member of the U.T.T.C. Student Senate and just won a national scholarship. He's one of the reasons we appreciate your support.

In addition, we appreciate the Legislature and the Governor's efforts regarding "First Nations Day"- a true bipartisan effort. I would like to thank Senators Bob Stenehjem and Dave O'Connell and Representatives Rick Berg and Merle Boucher for the leadership they provided concerning First Nations Day. In both 2003 and 2004 the observance of this day has given the State of North Dakota yet another chance to begin to understand the common issues we face.

These are some of the areas of cooperation. There's much more to do and more that we can do together.

For example, we now have a grant from the Department of Justice to assist us, in cooperation with the State Legislature, the Governor's Office, and the Attorney General's Office, to reduce the use of drugs

and alcohol statewide. We must stop the use of meth in our rural communities, whether on or off the reservations. I'm confident that we can cooperate on this issue and make a real impact to reduce drug use. I personally would like to thank Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem for his leadership concerning our continued battle with this horrific problem.

Another topic, health care, is of great concern to us. Our people suffer from diabetes and heart disease. The numbers are much higher than state and national averages.

But again, I believe there's hope for the future. I've made sure that our Tribe is well represented in a statewide health care task force just now getting started. We want to make sure that wherever our Tribal members are located in the State of North Dakota, they have access to quality health care and can learn to adopt a healthy lifestyle.

We know that more needs to be done to strengthen efforts to reduce discrimination in our state. But don't misunderstand me. Discrimination is not an excuse.

It's vitally important for our Tribal members to have the skills through education and job training to overcome discrimination, to know how to get and keep a job, to work hard and be the most productive citizens they can be, no matter what kind of education and job they decide to seek, no matter what the barriers may be.

We know that we can do a lot more to assist each other with economic development. Our unemployment rate is still too high, 50 percent or more, and we know we have a lot of talented people who can fill good jobs and reduce the welfare rolls.

We appreciate the leadership provided by Representatives Rick Berg, George Keiser, and Ken Svedjan, and Senators Bob Stenehjem, Dwight Cook, and Rich Wardner and the efforts made by the 58th Legislative Assembly concerning HB 1504. This bill states that the Interim Legislative Council should consider "methods of creating business partnerships with North Dakota Indian tribes in order to increase primary sector business growth in the state, with a focus on business opportunities that may be available to North Dakota Indian tribes through the United States Small Business Administration 8(a) business development program."

We appreciate that the Governor mentioned in his State of the State speech on Tuesday the effort started last session to involve Tribes and their members in state economic development efforts. We look forward to working with the Legislature to strengthen the proposed legislation. We need to figure out ways to encourage tribal economic development and to create the opportunities for the partnerships the Governor and the Legislature have begun to talk about. In the end, our tribal economic development, as we have already seen in gaming, creates new opportunities and jobs for state citizens and is good for the State of North Dakota. We look forward to working with the Governor and the Legislature on these issues in this 59th Legislative Assembly to continue this effort.

Our Tribe has limited funding available for economic development from the Equitable Compensation Act. We received these funds because of the loss of our lands that are now under Lake Oahe. The simple fact is that these funds are not enough to reduce our unemployment picture.

We are also working together with the State on child care licensing issues. Child care is a vital component of economic development.

Housing also remains a critical issue for our people. We need to learn to develop strategies to increase our housing supply; I know we can do this.

In closing, let me say that I look forward to working with the Legislature to create economic development programs that serve the interests of all citizens of North Dakota.

There are so many positive things that we can accomplish if we do as one of our great Hunkpapa leaders, Sitting Bull, said years ago, "put our minds together and work to solve the problems."

Our Tribal-State relationship will flourish through cooperation, respect, and communication. We've been working on that for the past 20 years and we must continue doing so in the future. When issues arise or information is needed, please feel free to contact my office. Many times, things can be worked out fairly and quickly in this manner. Pe'lamaya (Thank you). God Bless America and the freedom it represents.

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