

State of the Tribal-State Relationship

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Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa
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Sni ka shon nee hee wow, apee tow kooshin, tawshi keya awaw anouch Mezame.

It is an honor to be invited here to present the 12th State of the Indian Nations Address. The first was provided by Russell Hawkins, Chair, Sisseton-Wahpeton, in 1985.

I would like to apologize in advance for my limitations in providing such an important presentation and if for some reason I say anything that is offensive or distasteful to any person, I'm sorry. Maybe we can have coffee and I can further explain my position.

Honorable members of the North Dakota state government - executive branch officials, legislative branch officials, and judicial branch members and citizens of North Dakota - I am here today representing five aboriginal peoples or Nations with land holdings within the boundaries of North Dakota. I cannot begin to presume that in this short presentation I will be able to express the needs, aspirations, and hopes of the peoples of Standing Rock, Spirit Lake Nation, Three Affiliated, Sisseton-Wahpeton, and yes even Turtle Mountain Chippewa and Trenton Indian Service Area.

As each branch of the North Dakota government carries out its constitutional duties and responsibilities, please keep in mind that as a result of treaties, federal Indian law, and actions by the United States Congress and federal courts, tribes have a unique international, national, and local government-to-government relationship with federal and state governments.

The primary areas of tribal concern on the Turtle Mountain Reservation are:

1. Poverty.
2. Job creation.
3. Health care and wellness.
4. Housing.
5. Water quality and quantity.
6. Roads and transportation.

All of these issues will be solved and supported by focusing upon the most basic unit of society, the family, mom and dad and children, through offering highest quality affordable educational opportunities to all ages of our state's population, especially the poor, be it through home schooling, private schools, tribal school, or public educational institutions.

If primary concerns of tribes are supported by authorized state laws and appropriated dollars, then of course the greatest quest of Tribal Nations within North America and North Dakota will incrementally and concretely be advanced and that is strong healthy families through economic self-sufficiency and determination.

Given the great desire for economic, entrepreneurial, and community development within North Dakota's Indian Country, let the White Man and the Red Man resolve to achieve several specific objectives:

PERSONAL LEVEL

Promote the spirit of understanding, dialogue, and unity among Tribal Governments and state governments, but especially among individuals, e.g., invite a Native person to supper.

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Support and promote organized and consistent dialogue through our tribal colleges and North Dakota University System by increasing faculty, staff, and student exchanges.

STATE LEVEL

Fully support the Governor's Indian Affairs Commission and continue the work of the Indian Legislature dialogue group.

SPIRITUAL LEVEL

Prayer.

Before I conclude my remarks, I would like to acknowledge all of the little people who work behind the scenes to help make Indian and state relations a success. Though I will or may never know you personally, I salute you and thank you!

In addition, I would like to acknowledge my No. 1 advisor in life, my father, Aloysius and my mother, Theresa Brien and my six older brothers Pierre, Charles, Ben, Terrance, Mark, and Michael, and Auntie Stella and of course my wife Nancy and children Rosie, Gabriel, Claire, Anne, Maria, Mathias, and Nathaniel.

In addition, I would like to thank several additional elders/mentors who have enriched my life with their kind words, example, support, and most importantly, friendship: the late Bishop James Sullivan, Tom Tracy and family, Earl Strinden, Claire Carlson, and my new acquaintance which I trust will grow into true respect and friendship, the North Dakota elected officials.

We have been united through my words. My friends allow us to be united spiritually by concluding with several prayers. A quote from John Paul II, Getting the Right Perspective. "There is the temptation of thinking that the results of our work and labor depend on our ability to act and to plan. God invites us to invest all our resources of intelligence and energy in serving the cause of the kingdom, but it is fatal to forget that 'without Christ we can do nothing.'"

Thank you.

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