

Tribal-State address marks 30 years

SPEECHES NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE

Story & photos by Dennis J. Neumann, *United Tribes News (UTN)*, January 10, 2015



Standing Rock Chairman Dave Archambault II addressing a joint session of the North Dakota Legislature on January 8, 2015.

BISMARCK (UTN) – When the chairman of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe spoke to a joint session of the North Dakota Legislature in early January, his appearance marked 30 years of formal communication about the relationship between Tribes and the State of North Dakota.

SRST Chairman Dave Archambault II presented the 16th “State of the Tribal-State Relationship” address January 8 at the State Capitol in Bismarck. Archambault was the third leader from Standing Rock to address the state’s top elected leaders in this forum since the practice began in 1985.

All have been tribal chairs elected from the five tribes located wholly or in part in North Dakota. All have used the occasion to express thoughts about subjects that matter most to tribes and tribal people.

“Remember we are all citizens of this state; we all contribute to the state’s economy,” said Archambault, describing the lack of access to affordable credit. “Unfortunately, it is the individuals living on our reservations – the most impoverished areas of the state – that face the greatest barriers. We ask that you help us remove those barriers, so that these individuals can help build a better future for themselves, their families, our Tribal Nations, and our State.”

The Chairman’s 23-minute speech offered a business-like perspective, informed by his higher education degrees in business and management, his experience as a business owner on Standing Rock, and his work in tribal higher education and jobs training.

Like those who preceded him at the rostrum, Archambault described the challenges and goals for economic development on the reservations, where unemployment has registered from 40 to 80 percent, and “far exceed(s) the conditions that existed when our nation underwent the great depression of the 1930s,” one chairman said. “The economic conditions...shock the conscience.”

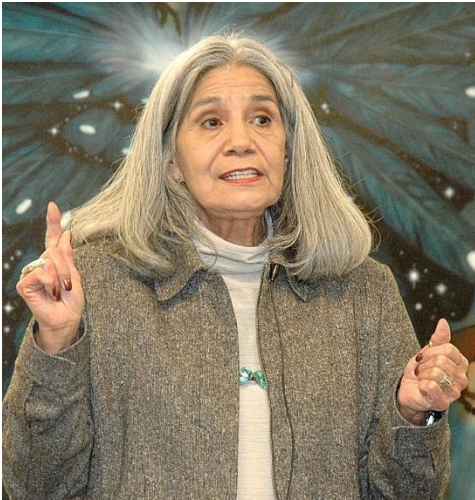
Speech Themes

Tribal leaders have reached-out for cooperation in the speeches, along with inclusion in state programs. They point out the government-to-government relationship and recommend areas where the state might pay attention, work harder, pass laws or loosen the purse strings. There’ve been appeals to work together on jurisdictional issues, to fight poverty on the reservations, combat

unemployment, improve educational opportunities, promote fairness in the justice system, erase misunderstanding, and combat prejudice. One leader added that lawmakers should “take an Indian to lunch” to learn more about the humanity of Indian People.

Speech Origins

The idea for a “State of the Relationship Address” came about in 1983. It was the brainchild of Brian Palecek of the North Dakota Peace Coalition, now English and Humanities instructor at United Tribes Technical College. It emerged from discussions with state lawmakers, and conversations and meetings with then UTTC President David Gipp, activist and UTTC Attorney Tom Disselhorst, and ND Indian Affairs Commission Director Juanita Hephrey.



Juanita Hephrey



Brian Palecek



Tom Disselhorst

Palecek shuttled between tribal leaders on the United Tribes Board of Directors and lawmakers on legislative committees, coordinating a dialogue that resulted in an invitation to the tribes to present the first address during the 1985 Session. The opportunity for this level of communication took root and remarkably has remained part of North Dakota’s legislative process.

Occasion for Ceremony

The setting for the tribal address is on the third day of the legislative session, convened every-other year in January. It follows two formal speeches on the first and second legislative days respectively: The “State of the State” by the Governor and the “State of the Judiciary” by the Supreme Court Chief Justice. The ceremony and protocols observed for state leaders is likewise extended to the tribal leaders: formal introductions, escorts to and from the chamber, standing applause and many handshakes of support and respect. The occasion includes prayers in word, and occasionally in song, in the speakers’ Native tongue, along with Flag and Honor Songs from singers at a drum.

In the audience are virtually all of the movers and shakers of state government. Seated in the legislative chamber are elected officials in the executive branch from the Governor on down, members of the State Supreme Court, all of the lawmakers elected to the State Legislature, a good many appointed officials of state government, and the chairs and/or representatives of the five Tribes. Tribal high school and college student groups are present in the gallery, as well as tribal friends, family and well-wishers.

Other events have been added to the day, bringing depth and detail to the occasion. Prior to the speech there is a briefing session for state agencies to provide status reports on tribal-related issues. And there are tribal recognition and gift-giving presentations, along with a tradition meal served for all by United Tribes students and staff in the capitol’s Great Hall.

All Tribes Involved

All of the state's tribes have had a turn at presenting the address. The first was Russell Hawkins, chair of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe (now Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate), the only speaker from that tribe. Leaders of the Three Affiliated Tribes of the Mandan-Hidatsa-Arikara Nation (Fort Berthold) have presented five times, the most of any tribe. Turtle Mountain leaders have taken the podium four times, and three each for the leaders of Standing Rock and the Devils Lake Sioux Tribe (now Spirit Lake).



Russell Hawkins



Tex G. Hall



Myra Pearson

Two leaders have presented twice: Richard J. LaFromboise of Turtle Mountain in 1987 and 1999, and Tex G. Hall of Three Affiliated in 2003 and 2011. The two female leaders who gave the address were both from Spirit Lake: Ila Lohnes in 1991 and Myra Pearson in 2009. Deciding who makes the presentation takes place in meetings of the North Dakota Indian Affairs Commission, on which all the tribes are represented.

Building Still Underway

The significance of this major address was described by former United Tribes President David M. Gipp in a pamphlet published following the first speech in 1985. It marked the first time federally recognized tribes had accepted an invitation “to officially speak before a legislative branch of government in the 20th Century,” Gipp wrote.

He called the speech “a key statement about the state of affairs” of the tribes and a “composite” view of their common experiences. He pointed out that the address suggests “positive approaches” for building mutual agreements and equitable access to capital and banking resources.



David M. Gipp

Gipp suggested the address could “further open the door to the common cause of improved human and institutional relations.”

It was his hope that it become a “cornerstone upon which Indian and non-Indian can constructively build.”

That the building process is still underway is encouraging and hopeful.

Link to Learning

Now, all of the Tribal-State Relationship addresses presented to the North Dakota Legislature since 1985 are assembled in one, easy-to-access location. Written texts of the 16 speeches are available on the United Tribes Technical College website at this link: <http://www.uttcc.edu/news/stsr.asp>. They are accompanied by additional information including sound files, photographs, popular-press news clippings, and the 1985 pamphlet: “The State of the Relationship: A Tribal Perspective.”

Many possibilities for study and research present themselves for students and researchers of tribal and state government affairs, oratory and tribal leadership. The collection presents the entire series of one of the most formal speaking occasions for tribal leaders in North Dakota over the past 30 years.

<><><><><>

State of the Relationship Presenters

1. January 10, 1985: Chmn. Russell Hawkins, Sisseton/Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, 49th Legislative Session
2. January 8, 1987: Chmn. Richard J. LaFromboise, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, 50th Legislative Session
3. January 6, 1989: Chmn. Edward Lone Fight, Three Affiliated Tribes, 51st Legislative Session
4. January 9, 1991: Chmn. Ila Lohnes, Devils Lake Sioux Tribe, 52nd Legislative Session
5. January 7, 1993: Chmn. Wilbur Wilkinson, Three Affiliated Tribes, 53rd Legislative Session
6. January 6, 1995: Chmn. Jesse “Jay” Taken Alive, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 54th Legislative Session
7. January 8, 1997: Chmn. Russell D. Mason Sr., Three Affiliated Tribes, 55th Legislative Session
8. January 8, 1999: Chmn. Richard J. LaFromboise, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, 56th Legislative Session
9. January 11, 2001: Chmn. Phillip “Skip” Longie, Spirit Lake Nation, 57th Legislative Session
10. January 9, 2003: Chmn. Tex G. “Red Tipped Arrow” Hall, Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara Nation (Three Affiliated Tribes), 58th Legislative Session
11. January 6, 2005, Chmn. Charles W. Murphy, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 59th Legislative Session
12. January 5, 2007: Chmn. David Brien, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa; 60th Legislative Session
13. January 8, 2009: Chmn. Myra Pearson, Spirit Lake Tribe, 61st Legislative Session
14. January 6, 2011: Chmn. Tex G. “Red Tipped Arrow” Hall, Mandan/Hidatsa/Arikara Nation (Three Affiliated Tribes), 62nd Legislative Session
15. January 10, 2013: Chmn. Richard McCloud, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, 63rd Legislative Session
16. January 8, 2015: Chmn. Dave Archambault II, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, 64th Legislative Session

-0-

Excerpts Remembered

“North Dakota has been a leader in Indian education. Nevertheless, there is much more to accomplish. There is a need to further develop Indian curriculum and to update materials that are available in school systems throughout the state. The State Dept. of Public Instruction’s Office of Indian Education will need more substantial support in carrying out this mission.”

– Chairman Russell Hawkins, Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe, January 10, 1985

-0-

“We are here today as survivors of a relationship fraught with broken promises, misguided policies, poverty, disease, assimilation, relocation, acculturation, and termination.

“And we will be here for all the tomorrows yet to come, long after you, your children, and your children's children are drawn from this great state by the lure of a life not tied to the land.

“We *are* tied to this land. We were always tied to this land. We always will be tied to this land. We are going nowhere. It is your people who are leaving.”

– Chairwoman Ila Lohnes, Devils Lake Sioux Tribe, January 9, 1991

-0-

“The economic conditions that exist on North Dakota's Indian reservations shock the conscience. Unemployment ranges anywhere from 60 percent to as high as 80 percent. These far exceed the conditions that existed when our nation underwent the great depression of the 1930s. Yet, whenever tribes attempt to improve their economic conditions, tribes are often met with forced opposition from the State...whether it's in the area of hunting and fishing, taxation, or Indian gaming.”

– Chairman Edward Lone Fight, Three Affiliated Tribes, January 6, 1989

-0-

“There is a perception that there's a great pot of money that takes care of our needs. That is totally false. It's totally untrue. That would be the same as saying farmers are all taken-care-of because the Federal Government provides for them with CRP...the largest welfare checks in the country.”

– Chairman Richard J. LaFromboise, Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, January 8, 1999

-0-

“Establishing casinos on the reservations has provided us an economic foundation...Our gaming enterprises have boosted not only reservation economies but also local and state economies, in addition to creating approximately 2,500 jobs. Non-Indian employees at North Dakota Indian casinos make up about 18 percent of the workforce.”

– Chairman Phillip “Skip” Longie, Spirit Lake Nation, January 11, 2001

-0-

“Due to lack of infrastructure, all the flaring releases harmful toxins into the air, when the MHA Nation could increase revenue and protect the environment if it had the infrastructure to collect natural gas from the well-head to a pipeline. The transportation of oil utilizing a pipeline would reduce traffic and improve the safety of our roads. There are over 100 wells on our reservation so far and we expect over 1,000 more. But we don't have the infrastructure or the staffing to support maximum and planned development.”

– Chairman Tex G. Hall, Three Affiliated Tribes of the MHA Nation, January 6, 2011

<><><><><>