

## **TRIBAL AND STATE RELATIONSHIP ADDRESS**

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My name is Myra Pearson, Chairwoman for the Spirit Lake Tribe. As this is to be my last state of the Tribes address, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on the past progress we have made, discuss some of the obstacles we have encountered and stress the importance of fostering a strong Tribal/State relationship.

In recent years, North Dakota and the Tribes located within the state have been the focus of national attention due in large part to the oil boom. As an emerging leader in the energy industry our state and tribes have finally emerged from anonymity to national leaders in the energy sector. Of course, not all of the national attention has been positive. To that end it is important that we learn from both our negative and positive experiences while we forge new and stronger relationships.

In my years of public service, I have had the great pleasure of serving alongside many great tribal leaders. I am thankful for those who came before me such as Alyce Spotted Bear from Twin Buttes District, MHA Nation. Alyce Spotted Bear was a political leader who for years served as a role model for people like myself and I am grateful for her wisdom, leadership and mentorship. Building off of the paths forged by such women it has been a privilege to watch as 2018 saw many more women, and particularly native women stepping forward into public service. Although female leadership has been strong within Indian Country, on the national political front we witnessed leaders like Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk), Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) elected to the United States Congress and here in North Dakota Ruth Buffalo became the first Native American Democrat woman to be elected to the North Dakota legislature. Indeed, this has been a positive year for Native American women.

Despite so many positive contributions being made by native women, 2018 also placed a spotlight upon the most vulnerable among us. The untimely and brutal deaths of Savannah Greywind and Olivia Lone Bear forced local, state and national attention to the fact that indigenous women are missing and murdered at rates far exceeding national averages and all too often justice alludes the families in such cases. Senator Heitkamp was an important partner and advocate for native women throughout her term of services as she champions important legislation such as Savannah's Act and the Violence Against Women Act. It is imperative that we, as public servants, continue to champion such efforts to address systemic inequities, bridge gaps in our justice systems and support important legislative changes to safeguard our women, children and men.

Closer to home, I have served the Spirit Lake Tribe as Chairwoman for a total of 18 years. During my terms of office, I have seen many political legal and policy changes aimed at addressed issues and relationships with tribal communities. Such efforts have often focused on important issues such as community safety, child welfare and justice, economic development, and governmental regulation and revenue sharing.

Although some of the past laws, policies and programs have been good for our community, many have not. The Spirit Lake Tribe continues to face a number of pressing obstacles and challenges. Like so many communities in the state of North Dakota, the Spirit Lake Tribe has seen dramatic increases in methamphetamine and prescription drug abuse. Substance abuse has directly contributed to the higher-than-average rates of child abuse and neglect and resulted in an increase in violent crimes on the Spirit Lake Reservation. The Spirit Lake Tribe needs resources to intervene in the trafficking and possession of such substances and we also need the resources to rehabilitate those individuals facing addiction. Currently the Tribe is operating with a skeletal BIA law enforcement service, minimal mental health

services and limited outpatient addiction treatment. To combat this public welfare crisis, we must seek out all resources to hold accountable those who bring these substances to our communities and to support measures that heal individuals and families impacted by addiction.

Economically the Spirit Lake Tribe has reinvested much of our governmental revenue into social programming, housing and economic diversification. Although housing and home ownership opportunities on the reservation remain out of reach for many, the Spirit Lake Tribal Council has worked to increase home ownership opportunities for members in part through the rehabilitation of existing homes. As part of this effort, employment and training opportunities have been provided for those in the construction trades and partnerships formed with Cankdeska Cikana Community College and have provided an important opportunity to develop a skilled labor force.

In addition to housing projects, we have recently completed renovations on a mini mall in Fort Totten. Historically the Spirit Lake Tribe has lacked local services and a small business sector resulting in much of our spending power has gone off the reservation. Today, through projects like the mini mall, the Spirit Lake Casino and Resort Grocery, the Spirit Lake Marina, and other such business ventures, we are able to offer opportunities for the growth of our small business sector, employment opportunities, and vital revenue streams for our government. All of these allow us to meet needs within our community.

Beyond the local work of the Spirit Lake Tribal Council, the Tribe has been working closely with Governor Burgum and the State Tax Commissioner to take a hard look at taxation, revenue sharing and opportunities for state and tribal collaboration. This renewed dialogue on regulatory matters is extremely important to ensure effective and consistent regulation, appropriate governmental revenue sharing, and support for tribal self-determination. Such efforts encourage economic development and provide important governmental revenue to help us as we attempt to address social and economic issues. The desire of the Governor to pursue collaborative agreements with the tribes has been instrumental to fostering mutual respect between our tribal nations and the state of North Dakota.

In closing, I would offer that as tribes we must recognize our sovereignty as not only a shield against infringement but also a sword that carries with it the full weight to implement laws, develop essential policies, support social programming, develop culturally relevant services and enter into cooperative agreements that will meet the needs of our respective communities. It is important that we understand our sovereignty but it is equally important that we exercise it. As elected officials the people who put us into office count on us. They place their trust in us each and every day to make decisions and act in a manner that serves the greater good of our communities. Although my time in public service will soon come to an end, it is my sincere hope that our future tribal and state leaders will continue to engage in meaningful collaborations that build upon the foundation laid for them.

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