



TRIBAL AND STATE RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Tuesday, August 19, 2025
Blue Dog Room, Dakota Magic Casino & Hotel
16849 102nd Street SE
Hankinson, North Dakota

Representative Dawson Holle, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m.

Members present: Representatives Dawson Holle, Collette Brown, Jon O. Nelson; Senators Richard Marcellais, Tim Mathern, Scott Meyer*

Member absent: Representative Matthew Heilman

Others present: Tamara St. John, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance
See [Appendix A](#) for additional persons present.

*Attended remotely

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Ms. Katie Carpenter, Counsel, Legislative Council, reviewed the *Supplemental Rules of Operation and Procedure of the North Dakota Legislative Management*.

Ms. Carpenter presented memorandums entitled *Tribal and State Relations Committee - Background Memorandum* and *Taxation of Land Owned by Enrolled Tribal Members Study - Background Memorandum*.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Les Thomas, President, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance, provided information (Appendices [B](#) and [C](#)) regarding tribal tourism. He noted:

- The North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance (NDNTA) was formed in 2016 to preserve, protect, promote, and educate the world about North Dakota tribal history and cultures.
- Tourism in North Dakota provided an economic benefit of \$3.3 billion in 2023 and \$3.4 billion in 2024.
- The United Tribes Technical College Powwow has an economic impact of about \$10 million each year.
- Tribal tourism presents an opportunity for the state and tribal nations to work together to highlight tourism both nationally and internationally.
- NDNTA provides information regarding tribal tourism in rest stops and convention and visitors bureaus throughout the state.
- Each tribe has its own amenities and is able to tailor tours to the needs of the tourists.
- Tribal nations are working to become year-round, family friendly destinations.

In response to questions from committee members, Mr. Thomas noted NDNTA is planning several events for the next year, including:

- Spotighting Native American dancers at the North Dakota Country Fest.

- Holding the first international peace conference and the first international indigenous peace powwow in Dunseith.
- Collaborating with the Norsk Høstfest Scandinavian Festival to tell the history of one tribe each year and showcase powwow dancers.
- Native American heritage month in November.

Ms. Stacey LaCompte, Director, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance, provided information ([Appendix D](#)) regarding tribal tourism. She noted:

- NDNTA was started with assistance from the George Washington University International Institute of Tourism Studies.
- Each of the five tribes have members on the NDNTA Board, with members also serving as tour guides and tour coordinators.
- International and domestic tour companies contact NDNTA, which acts as a coordinator with the tribes to set up tours.
- Marketing has been important, including internationally, and international scouts have come to view site tours.
- Tours have been organized for representatives from several countries.
- There is a high demand for tours in Indian country, both internationally and domestically. These tours create sustainable economic benefits for tribal nations and allow tribes to tell cultural stories in their voices.
- NDNTA works with North Dakota Tourism closely on site tours to create regional tours within tribal nations.
- Creating sustainable economic benefits for tribal nations includes attracting visitors to North Dakota and creating tour itineraries that promote spending time and money within tribal communities to support tribal businesses, entrepreneurs, and artisans.
- The itineraries of each tour vary based on the desires of the tourist groups, and may include family friendly tours, tours that focus on outdoor activities, or tours that highlight environmental, cultural, or historical information.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. LaCompte noted NDNTA is working with the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library to develop a tourism itinerary for 2026.

Ms. Tamara St. John, Secretary, North Dakota Native Tourism Alliance, provided information regarding tribal tourism. She noted:

- NDNTA was the first organization of its kind in the nation and set a precedent for others to follow.
- George Washington University was instrumental in informing tribes on how to build sustainable tribal tourism programs.
- International travelers seek culture and authenticity, making tribal nation tourism well-suited to meet the interests of international travelers.
- Tourism highlights the sovereign status of tribes, allowing tribes to share their cultural history and laws or rules related to visiting burial sites or archaeological features.
- State partners work with NDNTA on projects related to tribal tourism. Tribal tourism not only promotes commerce, but also encourages traditional cultural expressions, such as beadwork and ribbonwork.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. St. John noted she serves as the Tribal Archivist and works with the tribe's artifacts and collections. She provided a history of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate and noted:

- The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate represents two of the Seven Council Fires of the Oceti Sakowin, also known as the Great Sioux Nation.

- The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate are Dakota, the bands of which are Sisseton and Wahpeton, with origins in the woodlands of Minnesota and Wisconsin.
- Through treaties and land cessions, the tribe relocated to its current location in 1867.
- The tribe's treaty territory extends to about Watertown, South Dakota, and includes what is now known as the Spirit Lake Nation.
- The Spirit Lake Nation and the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation have been proactive in building a relationship and the tribes and the tribal historic preservation offices have addressed federal issues together and released joint statements.

Mr. Brad Hawk, Executive Director, Indian Affairs Commission, noted the commission has received international consulate visits and foreign countries are interested in how the state government works with indigenous communities.

HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. J. Garret Renville, Chairman, Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate, welcomed the committee. In response to questions from committee members, Chairman Renville noted:

- The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation are working with the South Dakota Department of Social Services to discuss managed care plans, which would allow the tribe to manage medical care for tribal citizens in South Dakota on Medicaid.
- North Dakota medical assistance has some elements of managed care and also could use this system.
- The tribe seeks to change health disparities in tribal communities and create a proactive model, as opposed to a reactive model.
- A reactive model is more expensive because health problems are caught later in diagnosis rather than prevented.
- A managed care model could cut costs and be state specific or use a national care organization.
- Discussions regarding the model have been held with the United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.
- Medicaid costs paid by the state are higher in urban areas than on reservations because there are no Indian Health Service centers in urban, off-reservation areas.
- If a tribal member lives in an urban area and is on Medicaid, the state is responsible for a larger portion of the member's health care costs.
- Costs under a managed care system would be prenegotiated.

Mr. Hawk provided information regarding efforts of the Indian Affairs Commission and the Governor's office to address human service needs. He noted:

- The Governor's office has a workforce subcabinet which discusses workforce development, including issues specific to tribal communities such as attracting medical providers, housing, and child care.
- The Governor's office is looking to create a tribal relations subcabinet and behavioral health and health care will be a large portion of the subcabinet's work.

No further business appearing, Chairman Holle adjourned the meeting at 4:01 p.m.

Katie Carpenter
Counsel

ATTACH:4