

Davis
1521
Legislative Assembly

North Dakota House of Representatives

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COMMITTEES:
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Good Morning Chairman Ruby and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in support of HB 1521, which seeks to restore the motor vehicle excise tax exemption for all enrolled members of federally recognized tribes in North Dakota.

For the record, my name is Jayme Davis, and I represent District 9, home to two of the five Native Nations that share geography with North Dakota. I am a proud member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, a proud citizen of the State of North Dakota, and of these United States.

Yesterday, on the House floor, state sovereignty was mentioned many times. I was grateful to hear so many speak to the importance of upholding our state's sovereignty, and I ask that we extend that same respect to our tribal nations—which is precisely what this bill aims to do.

Historical Context & The Need for HB 1521

Historically, all enrolled members of federally recognized tribes in North Dakota were exempt from the motor vehicle excise tax. This exemption recognized tribal members' unique legal status under federal law and respected the government-to-government relationship between tribes and the state. However, last session, House Bill 1223 changed this by limiting the exemption to only those living within reservation boundaries. This created inequity and placed an undue financial burden on many tribal members who reside off-reservation—often out of necessity for employment, education, or housing.

Why This Matters

- Tribal members are citizens of sovereign nations. Our legal status does not change based on where we live. Restricting the exemption to only those residing on reservations undermines our tribal sovereignty and disrupts the cooperative relationship between the state and tribes.
- It has created a unfair financial burden on Tribal Members. Many tribal members live off-reservation due to housing shortages, job opportunities, or educational pursuits. Penalizing them with a tax based on where they live create an additional and unnecessary hardship. Example is myself, I work on the reservation, I buy my groceries, get my gas, on the reservation but due to housing shortages I live 10 miles outside the reservation boundaries. My reservation is 6 miles by 12 miles so its not hard to live off reservation when your land base is so small. Therefore, in and around the Turtle Mountain Reservation there are four small communities that are less than 10 miles outside the boundaries of the reservation where many tribal members live that are now penalized because of the passing of bill 1223 last session.
- HB 1223 imposed a tax on a group of people and weren't notified. So, when the time came to buy a car for their child going to off to college - that extra tax made a huge difference. I got many calls, visits, and messages from those parents who stated, that for some it may not be a large amount of money but for them - it might as well be a million dollars because they couldn't afford it. So, they chose not to buy. Restoring the exemption is a small economic fix but a powerful statement of fairness and respect for our tribal nations.

- Lastly, by passing this bill you will restore efficiency and reduce the administrative burden that also came with it. Before HB 1223, this exemption functioned smoothly without issue. Restoration would eliminate the need for residency verification, a process that has proven to be complex, burdensome, and contentious for both the state and affected individuals.

By restoring this exemption, we reaffirm North Dakota's commitment to fairness and respect for its tribal nations. This is not just a tax policy issue, it is about honoring sovereignty, upholding fairness, and strengthening the relationship between the state and tribes.

I urge this committee to pass HB 1521 and restore the exemption that has served our state and its tribal citizens well for decades.

Thank you for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.