

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the Appropriations committee.

My name is Austen Schauer, District 13, West Fargo to be with you four times this morning.

I am here to present **House Bill 1603** as amended.

HB 1603 will help with the implementation and compliance of the **Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act**, otherwise known as **NAGPRA**.

The request is a **\$500 thousand matching grant** (maximum) to be divided among North Dakota's five tribes. Each tribe would provide **\$100 thousand dollars** to receive an equal amount from the State.

The funds would be directed to the **State Historical Society** to establish a **NAGPRA compliance committee**.

HB 1603 is not only **necessary** for compliance with federal law, but also a critical step in strengthening the partnership between North Dakota Tribes and the Historical Society.

There has been tension in the past.

As many of you may know, **NAGPRA** was enacted in 1990 to ensure Native American human remains, funerary objects, sacred objects, and cultural objects are returned to their rightful descendants and communities.

In late 2023, the U.S. Interior Department posted **new regulations** to streamline the return of human remains and cultural items.

There were four key changes in the ruling:

- **Enhanced Tribal Authority.**
- **Consent Requirements.**
- **Inventory Updates.**
- **Increased Transparency.**

The federal law is grounded in principles of respect for Tribal heritage, history, and sacred traditions.

However, many institutions, including those in North Dakota, have struggled with the complex and resource-intensive processes of identifying, cataloging, and repatriating cultural items in their collections.

For example, the **Heritage Center has 11 million Indian artifacts.**

Moreover, the federal government does little to help financially. It allocates about two million dollars each year to support **NAGPRA** compliance efforts to **584 Tribes.**

HB 1603 is an important step toward equipping both tribes and institutions with the necessary tools to ensure full compliance with **NAGPRA.**

By investing in staff, training, and consulting, we not only facilitate the return of human remains and sacred objects but also reinforce a long-term partnership built on trust and mutual respect.

Through the establishment of a committee comprised of representatives from the ND Historical Society, Tribal Historic Preservation Offices and the AG's office, we ensure decisions are made collaboratively, prioritizing projects that have the most significant impact on repatriation efforts.

HB 1603 is not just about compliance; it is about doing what is right.

We are now seeking your support ask for a **DO PASS** on **HB 1603**.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am open to questions.