



# Turtle Mountain Times

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## Turtle Mountain College Students Shine at AIHEC Student Conference



Gracie Herman named Student of the Year at AIHEC

BISMARCK — The American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC) Student Conference was held in Bismarck, ND from March 15–19, 2026. Turtle Mountain College (TMC) was one of the North Dakota Tribal Colleges that hosted the event and also coordinated several competitions, including Engineering (coordinated by Austin Allard), One Act Play (Jeremy Laducer), and Science Bowl (Phillip Brien). A total of 93 people from TMC represented the college, including 60 students who competed and 33 employees who served as coaches.

Students from Turtle Mountain College recently distinguished themselves at the 2026 AIHEC Student Conference, earning recognition not only for their academic and competitive achievements, but also for the professionalism and integrity with which they represented TMC.

Throughout the conference, our students participated in a wide range of academic and cultural competitions, demonstrating exceptional skills, preparation, and

commitment. Their strong performances are a testament to their hard work and to the quality of education provided at our college. Just as importantly, they approached each opportunity with humility and determination, reflecting the values that guide our institution.

Beyond their success in competition, our students served as outstanding ambassadors. They conducted themselves with respect, courtesy, and cultural pride in every interaction, whether engaging with fellow students, faculty, or tribal leaders from across the nation. Their ability to build connections, collaborate, and represent our college with dignity speaks volumes about their character.

We are especially proud of the way our students upheld the traditions and values of our tribal communities. They carried themselves with a sense of responsibility not only to their own academic success, but also to the larger pur-

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Taveshia Peltier named Coca Cola 1st Generation Scholar

## Family & Education First, A Career In Law Up Next

*First-year UND Law student Erin Keplin finds passion from family & past educational experiences*

By Dave DeCoteau Jr.  
TM Times News Staff

GRAND FORKS, ND — The University of North Dakota (UND) School of Law is quite fortunate to have two smart, accomplished students from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa currently enrolled in their program, two young women who have a passion for law and the same passion to advocate for Native Nations.

Last week the TM Times did a feature of SaNoah LaRocque, who's currently enrolled at UND School of Law, navigating her way through the challenges of law school and motherhood.

This week, though, it's Erin Keplin's turn to tell her story.

Keplin, the daughter of Curt and Alison Keplin of Belcourt, is a first-year law student at UND School of Law, who recently graduated from UND with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science.

Keplin was kind enough to take a few minutes out of her busy schedule to answer a few questions regarding her time at UND School of Law, as well as share some thoughts on how she got to



Erin Keplin

this stage of her life.

"I chose to attend UND School of Law because, as an alumna who earned my bachelor's degree in Political Science from UND, I

was already familiar with the strong support and the opportunities the university provides," Keplin stated. "Additionally, both my mom and my sister earned

their master's degrees from UND, which made my decision even more meaningful. The campus is beautiful, and the professors are incredibly engaging and knowl-

edgeable in their fields. I knew I would be supported academically and personally, which made UND School of Law the right choice for me."

Keplin said her passion for law started at an early age, and eventually grew even further from past educational experiences in the classroom and at home.

"My passion for law began at a very young age," Keplin expressed. "My mom, Alison Keplin, was a high school U.S. History teacher, and she often brought home large textbooks filled with powerful images and stories — particularly the enslavement of African American people. Even before I fully understood history or my place in the world, I knew in my heart that what I was seeing was deeply wrong. That early awareness sparked a lasting commitment to civil liberties and to advocating for disadvantaged communities and people."

Keplin added, "As I grew older and began to understand the historical injustices faced by Indigenous peoples, including my own Turtle Mountain community, my passion only deepened. What once felt like confusion as a child turned into something much more personal. By sixth grade, I knew

I wanted to become an attorney. In high school, that passion started to take shape. During my senior year, I became involved in student council and had the opportunity to speak at the North Dakota State Capitol in support of a bill addressing issues impacting our reservation's education system. I also shadowed State Representative, Marvin Nelson, which gave me a closer look at how advocacy and policy can create real change.

"I found strength in speaking my truth by sharing both the past and present experiences of my tribe and having meaningful conversations with people who were willing to listen and learn. Those moments showed me that our stories matter, and that using our voices could make a difference."

"That is what continues to drive me. I want to use the law as a way to support and uplift Indigenous communities. I feel a deep responsibility to uphold the federal trust responsibility to Native American tribes, something rooted in cases like Johnson v. McIntosh, Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, and Worcester v. Geor-

see: **LAW** on pg 7A

## Public notices are part of access and transparency in North Dakota government

By Amy Dalrymple  
ND Monitor

North Dakota lawmakers have voted at least three times in the past two sessions to continue printing public notices in newspapers.

Voters across the state overwhelmingly support printing municipal meeting minutes in their local newspaper each time the question appears on the ballot.

Despite this evidence of public support, the state Department of Trust Lands will no longer publish some public notices starting April 1.

As the Monitor's Jacob Orledge reported this week, the Department of Trust Lands will stop publishing notices of state oil and gas lease auctions in local newspapers. Instead, the department will only publish digital notices

of lease auctions on the agency's website and the website of Efficient Markets, the company that runs the auction process for the state.

This change is a bit unusual because other government entities that have (unsuccessfully) proposed similar moves had to bring their proposals to the full Legislature, where they received hearings and votes in the House and Senate.

But in this case, the Board of University and School Lands, which manages state-owned oil and gas minerals, is canceling newspaper public notices through an administrative rule change. The process did allow for public comment and required consent of a legislative committee. But administrative rule changes, which can often be tedious and dry, attract far less attention from the public than a bill proposed during

the legislative session. In this case, the public likely would not know about the change if not for the Monitor's reporting.

North Dakota Newspaper Association Executive Director Cecile Wehrman, who submitted comments opposing the rule change, told Orledge she doesn't think the full Legislature would have approved it. I think she's right. In 2025, the Legislature defeated a bill that sought to eliminate requirements to publish requests for bids on highway construction projects, and another that proposed to cease publication of county commission meeting minutes in local newspapers.

In 2023, lawmakers voted down a bill supported by the state Insur-



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Gov. Kelly Armstrong, right, Secretary of State Michael Howe, center, and Land Commissioner Joseph Heringer, left, listen to a presentation during a meeting of the Board of University and School Lands meeting on Dec. 11, 2025. The board voted to discontinue publishing some public notices in newspapers starting April 1. (Photo by Jacob Orledge/North Dakota Monitor)