



Tribal leaders call for sovereignty as federal support wavers

BY: MARY STEURER
ND Monitor

North Dakota tribal leaders say greater sovereignty is key to protecting their communities amid uncertain federal support.

“We come from a proud people who have always stood up for our rights, for our lands, for our resources,” Steve Sitting Bear, chair of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, said during a Wednesday presentation.

The comments came during the eighth annual Government to Government Conference in Bismarck. The event brings leaders of the five tribal nations that share geography with North Dakota and state officials together to discuss ways they can collaborate more effectively.

Jamie Azure, chair of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, called on leaders to do more than pay lip service to this idea, especially given the unpredictable future of federal programs under President Donald Trump’s administration.

“We ask that we get past the words — we ask that we have true partnerships moving forward because of the threats to our ways of life with potential cuts at the federal level,” he said.

The federal government is legally obligated to provide certain ongoing support to tribal nations.

The U.S. Department of the Interior, led by former North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, has recommended cutting more than \$1 billion in funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Bureau of Indian Education for the 2027 budget year.

The proposal includes a more than \$150 million reduction for tribal higher education. In a congressional budget hearing last month, Burgum questioned the cost-effectiveness of tribal colleges and universities compared



Billy Kirkland, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs for President Donald Trump’s administration, delivers the keynote address for the 2026 Government to Government Conference at the Bismarck Event Center on June 3, 2026. (Photo by Mary Steurer/North Dakota Monitor)

to other institutions.

Azure in his Wednesday speech said tribal higher education institutions support Native students in ways that other schools can’t.

“It’s community — it’s not only a college,” he said.

Azure said he’s proud of how North Dakota tribes have navigated interruptions and cuts to federal support so far. For example, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa set aside \$1.5 million to support tribal citizens when the federal government shut-down temporarily suspended major safety net services, he said.

Azure said tribal, state and federal leaders must do more to promote public safety in tribal communities. He urged the state of North Dakota and tribes to improve the implementation of the Feather Alert, the alert for missing, endangered or abducted Indigenous adults created by the

state Legislature in 2025.

Billy Kirkland, assistant secretary for Indian Affairs for the Trump administration, delivered the keynote address for the conference. Kirkland is a citizen of the Navajo Nation.

He said the Department of the Interior’s focus is cutting red tape that prevents tribal nations from exercising their independence.

“Indian Country isn’t a problem to be solved, but a partner to be empowered,” he said.

One priority of the Department of the Interior is working to eliminate the ongoing backlog of tribal probate cases, Kirkland said. The agency will soon establish a platform that allows people to submit and track their cases online, he said.

Another one of the Interior Department’s goals is making tribal land safer, Kirkland added. He noted that Burgum last month signed a secretary’s order



Mark Fox, chair of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, speaks during the eighth annual Government to Government conference in Bismarck on June 3, 2026. (Photo by Mary Steurer/North Dakota Monitor)

establishing the Indian Country Violent Crime Task Force.

Mark Fox, chair of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation, in his presentation said tribes should pursue policy changes that enable them to develop their own economies and

infrastructure, and not count on the federal government for financial support.

“Never will the United States come in and put enough capital — in my estimation, somewhere around maybe a trillion dollars

— into all the Indian reservations and build back what they destroyed,” Fox said. “Never, ever, ever, ever, ever are they going to do that. They’re basically going to hand feed you enough to survive.”

Sisseton-Wahpeton Chair J. Garret Renville in his presentation urged federal officials to consult with tribal leaders on policy decisions that affect their communities.

“I know this administration wants to make things more efficient, and so do we,” he said.

He applauded new federal rules implementing the Tribal General Welfare Exclusion Act, which supporters have celebrated as a win for tribal economic development. Renville said federal officials worked with him and other tribal leaders to develop the rules.

Burgum in 2018 started the first Government to Government Conference with former North Dakota Indian Affairs Commissioner Scott Davis.

This year’s conference wraps up Thursday.

Reach North Dakota Monitor reporter Mary Steurer at msteurer@northdakotamonitor.com

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the trust our community has placed in me through this election,” candidate-elect Dallas Morin said. “Thank you to everyone who voted, shared their thoughts, and supported me along the way. As a member of this community, I care deeply about our students, families, staff, and schools. I look forward to working with fellow board members and community members to support student success and make decisions that reflect the needs of our district... Thank you for this opportunity to serve... I am excited to get to work on behalf of our students and community.”

“My intentions and goals are to help improve academic scores from the students while working with the other board members,” DeCoteau said. “I believe we need to get more parents involved and put an emphasis on academics, and I plan to stay true to those goals... We have to fix it and not resist it... Parental involvement and student academic scores are my main goals. I plan to be here for the students; and I’ll do what I can to prove that... I also want to work with the teachers to help improve those academic scores, too.”

The 2026 Belcourt School Board #7 Election is set to be canvassed during the district’s regular monthly meeting on Monday, June 15, 2026. The new board members will be sworn in on Tuesday, July 14, 2026, during the regular July meeting.

BHERA of the Month Recognition Kerry Salmeron

Security/Ambulance



Above and Beyond Statement:

Kerry has been seen providing extra hands with anything in need. Kerry has been so helpful not only as a driver, but he knows what is to be done and he takes care of it. He has showed passionate care with the patients, and other transporting staff. He assists with transferring, he uses skill with critical care patients, he is safe and effective. He works very hard keeping the staff and patients safe. Kerry is not afraid to help, just ask I guarantee you he will not say no!

Kerry has been employed with IHS 5 years this coming September as security / ambulance 911 and patients transfers to higher medical care facilities when needed.

“As for my security position comes with assisting medical staff with aggressive patients and non-aggressive patients. I also assist in organizing transfers when needed. I like helping in the ER as much as possible.

My hobbies are cutting my grass, side by side rides, a little fishing and just a home body, I also like to fix small engines such as lawn mowers and pressure washers. I’m from California so I do travel back there on average every 2 to 3 years to visit family and friends.

My favorite part of my job is being able to help the patients and assist the nursing staff. Along with securing the IHS facility. I have made lots of friends here over the years and cherish all of them”.

Kerry was selected to be Recognized by BHERA for his hard work and friendliness with patients and staff.

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BID ADVERTISEMENT (Re-bid)

Disposition of Equipment

The Turtle Mountain Housing Authority will be accepting bids from now through June 10, 2026, at 2:00pm CST. Below is a list of vehicles and equipment being bid out:

- 2006 Chevrolet Silverado ¾ ton, 4x4, #10-Transfer Case issues.
- 2006 Chevrolet Silverado ¾ ton, 4x4, #22- Transmission issues.
- 2009 Ford F-150 ½ ton, 4x4, #19 - Transmission issues
- 2005 AGCO utility tractor 4x4 - PTO issues
- 2002 Ford F-250 ¾ ton, ext. cab, 4x4 - front end issues
- Husqvarna Lawn tractor - Parts
- Husqvarna Lawn tractor - Parts
- Cub Cadet Lawn tractor - Parts

****Unreasonably low bids may be rejected at TMHA’s discretion****

To view the items, please contact Property & Supply at (701) 477-3153. Bids should be submitted to the TMHA Main Office no later than 2:00pm on June 10, 2026. The bid should be in a sealed envelope with the name(s) of the equipment being bid on.

DISCLOSURE REQUIREMENT: Sale or disposition of used TMHA vehicles and surplus equipment is a procurement and contracting activity under federal regulations. See 2 CFR 200.313(e). Any TMHA employees and any of their Immediate Family members (as defined by TMHA Policy) must present a written disclosure of the potential conflict of interest if they are involved in the bidding/sale process for used TMHA vehicles and surplus equipment.

The Turtle Mountain Housing Authority reserves the right to reject any or all bids.