



Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe
LAKE TRAVERSE RESERVATION
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ORAL TESTIMONY—DAVID FLUTE, CHAIRMAN, SISSETON-WAHPETON OYATE
BEFORE SCIA, JUNE 29, 2016

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is David Flute, and I am the Chairman of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe. I am pleased to testify in support of S. 2796, the RESPECT Act, which would repeal certain obsolete laws concerning Indians. I'd like to submit our written remarks for the record. Thank you.

As Native Americans, respect for our Sovereign Native Nations, treaty rights, and Indian lands is imperative because our right to self-governance on our Reservations is Freedom and Liberty for us.

Senator Rounds provides leadership on Reconciliation with Native Americans in the Senate, as he did as Governor of South Dakota. For that, we thank him.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe as bands of the Dakota had our original homelands in Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and Iowa.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate is signatory to the 1851 Treaty with the Sisseton-Wahpeton Bands of Dakota Sioux and the 1867 Lake Traverse Treaty, which set aside the Lake Traverse Reservation as our "permanent reservation" homeland.

Our 1867 Treaty continues our "friendly relations with the Government and people of the United States" and recognizes our people's right to self-government.

Today, we have 13,177 tribal members located throughout the United States and others serving overseas in the Armed Forces.

We are proud of our service to the United States through the military. Woodrow Wilson Keeble, one of our most respected tribal members, served in World War II and in Korea and was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor by President George W. Bush.

Senator Rounds introduced the RESPECT Act, S. 2796, to strike some of the laws which have historically disadvantaged our Indian nations and our people. For example, there are still laws on the books for the removal of our children from our homes to be sent to compulsory boarding schools run by military officers, where the mantra was "Kill the Indian, save the Man."

The federal government began sending American Indians to off-reservation boarding schools in the 1870s, when the United States was still at war with Indians. An Army officer, Richard Pratt, founded the first of these schools. He based it on an education program he had developed in an Indian prison.

The laws concerning withholding rations, meaning food, from our people for “hostility” to the United States, or truancy should be struck from the books. As President Washington recognized from the beginning of our Nation’s history conflict between the United States and Indian tribes was often fomented by non-Indians encroaching on treaty lands.

As Senator Rounds said, “These statutes are a sad reminder of the hostile aggression and overt racism displayed by the early federal government toward Native Americans.”

Today, our treaties provide for perpetual peace, which we have sustained and protected through our active participation in the Armed Services of the United States for 140 years or more.

Perhaps the provision on Indian Reform Schools can be updated to provide for Education, Counseling, and Other Assistance to Indian youth in custody.

Perhaps the Army provision on facilities and staff can be consolidated and updated to provide for the transfer of unneeded facilities to Indian tribes.

Finally, perhaps a request can be added to President Obama and Congress to hold a public ceremony to announce America’s Apology to Native Americans, enacted under the leadership of Senator Brownback and Senator Inouye as Section 8113 of the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act. The President signed the Act, yet never held a ceremony with our Indian nations and tribes to proclaim it.

Native Americans should all be fully included in America as U.S. citizens and citizens of our Native Nations, with respect for our rights to Freedom, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

The Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux Tribe thanks the Committee and Congress for undertaking this good faith measure to provide healing of historic wrongs imparted on Native Americans. Education, Counseling, and Other Assistance to Indian youth in custody.