

Chairman calls for economic boost

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — The chairman of the Blackfeet Nation called for an increase in economic development for Native American tribes in the annual State of the Tribal Nations address last Thursday.

Increasing tourism by dispelling the stereotype that reservations are lawless places is impor-

tant for economic advancement of the Native American tribes, Willie Sharp told state lawmakers.

Native Americans make up 6.5 percent of the population in Montana, and Sharp said they could soon make up the largest minority in the state. That makes cooperation between the

Legislature and the Native American reservations very important, he said.

"I say together we can work and strive for economic sovereignty for each of our nations. We can work together, work to improve and enhance the quality of life for our nations," Sharp said.

He acknowledged difficulties facing Native Americans, including poverty, unemployment, a short life expectancy and high death rates. He also highlighted the need for improved education investment, strong tribal leadership and an easing of racial stereotypes between Native Americans and other Montanans.

Tribes ask for bigger share of N.D. oil tax

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota's Three Affiliated Tribes should get a larger share of tax collections from the reservation's oil production, which is needed to pay for road repairs and other consequences of oil development, the tribes' chairman said Friday.

"For lack of better words, it's almost like this could potentially overtake us," Tex Hall said during a hearing of the North Dakota Senate's Natural Resources Committee. "If we don't get on top of this, this can overtake us."

Hall asked committee members to support changes in a money allocation formula that would boost the tribe's oil tax collections by about \$22.5 million during the next two years. The panel's chairman, Sen. Stanley Lyson, R-Williston, said the panel would review the legislation again Monday.

The Fort Berthold Indian Reservation is at the center of an oil drilling boom in western North Dakota, as companies compete to extract oil from shale rock known as the Bakken formation.

Former Gov. John Hoeven and Hall's predecessor, Marcus Levings, signed an agreement in June 2008 that specifies how reservation production is regulated, and how oil tax collections were to be divided between the state and tribe.

Hoeven and Levings signed a permanent extension of the accord in January 2010. Its terms allow either the tribe or state to terminate the agreement with 30 days' notice.

It says the state of North Dakota gets 80 percent of tax collections from "fee land" on the Fort Berthold reservation, and 50 percent of the taxes from tribal trust lands.

Fee land is privately owned. Trust lands are held in trust by the federal government to benefit the tribe and individual tribal members.

Hall said Friday that an 80-20 split in the tribe's favor of oil tax revenues from trust lands would be fairer, instead of the present 50-50 division. Sen. John Warner, D-Ryder, whose district

includes the Fort Berthold reservation, has introduced legislation to make the change.

"This is not a windfall, this is not a profit thing," Hall said during Friday's hearing. "This is for our government, to build its roads, its health care and its infrastructure. If we don't have the necessary monies, this will slow (oil production) down. We cannot be overrun. Our people's safety and health come first."

North Dakota Tax Department data show the state has collected \$47.8 million in oil taxes from reservation production from September 2008 through December 2010, while the tribe has received \$21.3 million.

The state collected just over \$4 million in taxes in both November and December, while the tribe received more than \$2 million, Tax Department data shows.

Should the allocation formula be changed, the agency estimates North Dakota will collect \$19.6 million less in taxes during the 2011-13 budget period, which begins July 1.

The state would also transfer almost \$2.9 million of its collections to oil-producing counties, to make up for what they would have had if the distribution method had remained the same.

Hall appealed directly to lawmakers for changes in the tax allocation formula in a speech last month, and he has pressed Gov. Jack Dalrymple on the issue.

Dalrymple has said his budget recommendations include spending on state highways that would benefit the reservation. Ryan Bernstein, the governor's deputy chief of staff, said Friday that Dalrymple was neutral on the legislation.

The Fort Berthold reservation has about 1,500 miles of roads, including about 150 miles of state highway and 660 miles of county roads.

Hall said about 56 miles of reservation road that is heavily used by oil industry trucks needs urgent reconstruction this year, and more roads need similar attention in the future.

Ariz. governor targets planned casino

PHOENIX (AP) — Gov. Jan Brewer has signed into law a bill intended to derail a Southern Arizona tribe's plan to build a Las Vegas-style casino-hotel in the core of the Phoenix metro area.

Brewer signed the bill Tuesday, the day before the deadline for her to act on the bill approved by the Legislature last week.

Once it takes effect 90 days after the current legislative ses-

sion ends, the bill would allow the city of Glendale to annex the 54-acre site purchased years ago by the Sells-based Tohono O'odham Nation.

Casinos in Arizona must be built on American Indian reser-

vations.

The tribe is seeking to have the federal government add the site to the tribe's reservation. A legal challenge is pending in federal court.

Tribe honors Code Talker

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. (AP) — Navajo President Ben Shelly has ordered flags flown at half-staff in honor of Navajo Code Talker Johnny Alfred.

Tribal officials say the 91-year-old Alfred died last Saturday.

Flags will be lowered

across the Navajo Nation for five days starting Wednesday.

Alfred enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1942. He was one of hundreds of Navajos who used a code based on their native language to confound the Japanese during World War II.

Shelly says Alfred was a hard-working and compassionate

man who served the country well.

Alfred is survived by his wife, five children, 20 grandchildren and 30 great-grandchildren. A memorial service is scheduled Wednesday morning at the Assembly of God church in Tuba City. Burial will follow at a family plot.

Grants program to help Indian students

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) — Federal money will be used at South Dakota's public universities to increase the retention rate and success rate of Indian students.

The U.S. Department of Education will provide \$216,000 for the six universities.

South Dakota officials say it's an expansion of the College Access Challenge Grant program.

The program is already used at the South Dakota's technical institutes and at tribal colleges and tribal universities.

The state Education Department said Indian students make up 1.9 percent of the student population in state universities and 3.5 percent of the enrollment in the four technical institutes.

Vancouver opposes Cowlitz plan

VANCOUVER, Wash. (AP) — The city of Vancouver is joining Clark County in a lawsuit seeking to block The Cowlitz Tribe from building a casino near La Center, a few minutes drive from Portland.

The Oregonian reports the

appeal filed in federal court Monday in Washington, D.C., argues the Bureau of Indian Affairs doesn't have authority to approve the tribe's plan.

Two property owners, four La Center card rooms and the group Citizens Against Reserva-

tion Shopping also oppose the casino.

The project is backed by the Mohegan Tribal Gaming Authority. The Cowlitz Tribe won federal approval in December.

Deaths investigated

RIVERTON, Wyo. (AP) — Authorities are investigating the deaths of two people found in different parts of the Wind River Indian Reservation. A 53-year-old homeless woman was found dead alongside the road in Fort Washakie. A 19-year-old was also found dead in his home.

Man accused of stealing from tribe

MINOT, N.D. (AP) — A man is accused of stealing money from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa.

Anthony Keplin is charged in federal court with embezzlement and theft from an Indian tribal organization, and false

statements.

Keplin was scheduled to be arraigned in Minot last Friday.

Authorities say Keplin failed to report changes in employment and income while receiving general assistance benefits.

Grant energizes battle to stop Indian suicides

SIoux FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Morgan Pourier's wrists carry the scars of a child beaten down by bullying, trauma and family struggles on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation.

Though just an eighth-grader at Wolf Creek School east of Pine Ridge, she already has courted death in a bottle of pills and the edge of a blade.

But the culture of death that often grips reservation life did not kill Morgan. If anything, it transformed her into an important voice of hope in the fight against suicide across Indian Country.

And now, a newly awarded \$50,000 U.S. Department of Education grant could give her and other crusaders a helping hand as well.

The department's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools has awarded more than \$27 million in Project School Emergency Response to Violence — or SERV — grants since 2001 to

help school districts and higher-ed institutions respond to suicide and other traumatic events.

In Shannon County, that money will pay for a case manager to follow up with students who have attempted suicide or voiced thoughts of it.

"We want to make sure they are receiving services," said Allie Bad Heart Bull, who manages dormitory and residential life at Pine Ridge School. "We'll work with their parents. We'll do prevention, like peer counseling. The thing is, so many times, they get lost in the system. There is no follow-up. Hopefully, this will help change that."

National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention statistics indicate that tribal youths are much more likely than other American youths to kill themselves, especially in this region.

In 2009-10, nine students in the Shannon County School District killed themselves.

Pourier attempted suicide

Kids are five times more likely to think about suicide if they're being bullied...

within that time frame. Family trauma at home and bullying outside the home led her first to try overdosing on pills, then to cut her wrists, she said.

"I was a bad cutter," she said. "Most of last year, whenever I felt depressed, I sliced my wrists to relieve some of the pain."

Bullying is particularly problematic on the reservation, said Tiny DeCory, a community advocate involved in after-school and summer programs. Again and again, children are made fun of because of their size, the way they look and the way they dress, DeCory said.

"Even little kids are bullying

other kids for the way they look at them," she said. "Bullying leads to suicide ideations. Kids are five times more likely to think about suicide if they're being bullied."

That's not all. Eileen Janis, a suicide outreach worker for the tribe's Sweetgrass suicide project, estimated that half of the cases of suicide on her reservation involve sexual abuse. The bullying and sexual assaults lead to depression, Janis said, which in turn lead to alcohol and substance abuse.

The Project SERV grant runs six months and has to be applied for again, Bad Heart Bull said. But it is by no means the only suicide prevention effort taking place at Pine Ridge.

Indian Health Service's behavioral health department in Pine Ridge is a key player in dealing with troubled youths. So are Janis and the Sweetgrass Project, which is an arm of the tribe's health department and

helps to get screenings, early identification, referrals and follow-ups for at-risk youths.

And then there's Morgan Pourier.

She and other Oglala youths are part of a program called Be Excited About Reading, or BEAR. Coordinated by DeCory, the group uses singing, dancing and storytelling skills to put on skits, role play and educate youths about how to deal with the ugliest realities of reservation life.

"If I could afford to take these kids out of school, I'd be doing it every day in Indian Country," DeCory said. "I kid you not... North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana... we could do presentations every day."

Some group members such as Pourier speak personally to the dynamics of suicide. The skits then get to the issues of taunting others, of teens having babies, of children going hungry. Afterward, Pourier and the

others are there to listen.

"I know we are connecting," she said. "The kids in the lower grades, you can tell they look up to us. And the ones in the upper grades, they talk to us. When they feel depressed, they text us about how they're feeling."

"If they get to the point where they say they're going to do something, we get them help right away. I go to Tiny DeCory, and she gets them help."

It is a good therapy program, DeCory said, adding: "People have been in denial about this for generations. We're trying to end the silence. That's what BEAR does."

Now the U.S. Department of Education is joining the fight, too, and spurring hope across a landscape that sees too much senseless death. "Everything is kind of buzzing," Bad Heart Bull said. "We're doing a lot of prevention. You know, there's a lot of negativity out there. We have to bring that spark back up."