



Press Release - For Immediate Release

March 22, 2024

By Janet Alkire, Chairwoman
Standing Rock Sioux Tribe

Governor Kristi Noem's wild and irresponsible attempt to connect tribal leaders and parents with Mexican drug cartels is a sad reflection of her fear based politics that do nothing to bring people together to solve problems. Rather than make uninformed and unsubstantiated claims, Noem should work with tribal leaders to increase funding and resources for tribal law enforcement and education.

On the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, seven police officers patrol an area the size of two small states and serve a community of more than 12,000 tribal members and residents, needing at least 20 more officers to be fully staffed. At current staffing levels only one or two officers patrol at any given time. The United States agreed to provide law enforcement and other services in the treaties that were negotiated. In those treaties our tribal leaders ceded vast lands and resources, in exchange for peace, but the United States is failing to live up to its end of the deal. Our treaties are the law of the land and must be fulfilled.

Noem says that we should be more like the founding fathers of the United States and learn from their example, but then she ignores the very treaties, laws, and Constitution that the founding fathers wrote and negotiated. Without our treaties and model governments the Constitution, the United States, and South Dakota would not exist. The United States is built on the riches provided by Indian tribes. Even worse, Noem made her comments during a speech on education where South Dakota and the Federal government are failing tribal youth. More than 92 percent of tribal youth are educated in state public schools and almost all of our youth are educated according to state standards, many of which do not accurately or respectfully include tribal perspectives or priorities. Furthermore, the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings and Standards are not required despite being available for use since 2012.

How can young people in schools, albeit Native or Non-native, learn accurate history, culture, language, and values of tribal nations in South Dakota, which ultimately generate millions of dollars in economic revenue for the State, if they are not supported by the state education administration? All too often, state education policies and practices undermine the confidence and creativity of tribal youth. At a minimum, South Dakota should follow the lead of North Dakota and pass a law like SB 2304 enacted in 2021 that requires North Dakota public and nonpublic schools to teach Native American history. This is a good start, and much more is needed. Education of our youth must include tribal values and priorities.

Our youth are beautiful and smart. They are born with the blood of our ancestors and possess the strength and courage to change the world. Diversity and creativity are the keys to all of our survival. We need their youthful wisdom now more than ever. State public schools should honor this diversity and recognize the value of tribal histories and cultures. Our schools should provide a safe learning environment where all of our youth can learn together to solve the problems we will all face together.

Because of the treaties signed between tribes and the Federal government, both they and the state are responsible for supporting acceptable education of our tribal youth. The passage of the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act in 1975 and more recently the Tribally Controlled Schools Act of 1988 have not adequately addressed the encroachment of state schools and standards into the lives of tribal youth or the ability for tribes to control and direct their own educational systems. Instead of funding tribal schools, the Federal government sends our funding for the education of tribal youth to state schools. The Federal government's own actions are undermining federal Indian education.

Noem should be working like the founding fathers to uphold the laws of the land and provide the funding negotiated in treaties needed to support high quality law enforcement and education for all our youth, in both tribal and public schools. Rather than embrace Noem's politics of fear, we call on her to end her attempts to slander tribal leaders and parents. Noem should embrace the politics of truth and compassion. We remember who we are every day, and this is why we are a people rich in culture and history. Change the villainous media tactics to resolution-based messages, Governor Noem. Work with us and not against us.

Contact the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe at 701-854-8500 or email media@standingrock.org for questions.