

TESTIMONY OF
PHYLLIS HOWARD
BEFORE THE TRIBAL AND STATE RELATIONS COMMITTEE
DECEMBER 17, 2015

Good morning Chairman Nelson, members of the committee, Chairman Archambault, Chairman Fox, Chairman McCloud, Chairman Pearson, Chairman Renville and other members of the committee. My name is Phyllis Howard, tribal enrolled member of the Three Affiliated Tribes, from the Fort Berthold Reservation, and the Director of the Health Equity Office, with the North Dakota Department of Health. I am here today as a tribal member speaking on behalf of the tribal groups to open dialogue with the Tribal and State Relations Committee to discuss the topic of using state alcohol tax to fund tribal transportation programs.

Alcohol taxes could provide a potential source of substantial revenue for Tribes who need funds to transport patients from the Indian reservations to access health care at quality health facilities in the state. The patients' health requirements range from alcohol and drug treatment to the elderly who need regular care for chronic disease as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, COPD, and stroke related care. On December 3, 2015, a quarterly meeting was held between the Tribal Human Services, Health Departments (both Tribal and ND Department of Health), Indian Health Services, and the North Dakota Department of Human Services, at which time this topic came up and discussion was held. The tribal participants indicated there are no tribal funds to transport patients to health facilities to access health care. I asked the question: Is it time for the tribes to look into using state alcohol taxes to fund tribal transportation

programs. There is a similar program already in place with the state tobacco funds that tribes do access to support tobacco cessation activities in the tribal communities.

There was no discussion on raising excise alcohol taxes in the state to support the tribes, nor was there discussion on reforming alcohol tax policies. However, there was general knowledge that the state imposes an alcohol tax on a given volume of alcoholic beverage at different rates on different types of alcohol beverages. There also is general knowledge that all Indian Tribes have Tribal Casinos that serve alcoholic beverages that are taxed by the state and the tribes do not receive any of this tax revenue to support programs.

In closing, there are more questions that can be formed than answered at this time. However, this is an excellent time to generate state discussion about the relationship of alcohol tax and health issues among the most disparate populations in the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this issue before the Tribal and State Relations Committee.