

Reps. Milroy, Mursau, Sen. Smith: Legislation to provide in-state tuition for members of tribal nation

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State Representatives Nick Milroy (D-South Range) and Jeff Mursau (R-Crivitz), along with Senator Jeff Smith (D-Brunswick), are introducing legislation that would allow any tribal member in the nation to receive in-state tuition with the University of Wisconsin System. Each recipient must be enrolled with a tribe that is recognized by the US Bureau of Indian Affairs and must meet all admission standards to be eligible.

“The number of American-Indian students attending the UW System has declined by nearly half in the last 10 years, while enrollment of all other minority populations has increased,” said Mursau. “I am hopeful this bill will remove a barrier and attract more American-Indian students to pursue their studies in Wisconsin.”

“Legislation like this is crucial for numerous reasons,” said Kat Werchouski, an enrolled member of the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe. “It removes barriers often encountered by Indigenous students when trying to pursue advanced degrees. It is far too often that I have to stand by the sides of students who are facing decisions about paying tuition versus rent, buying food, helping their families, or simply stopping their dream of bettering themselves through education. Supporting and passing this would be a game changer across Wisconsin and higher education. I would be honored to work in a state that can extend this sort of assistance to *any* student at a time where education is becoming more expensive, yet is sought after as a more marketable qualification by employers.”

“Throughout the 19th century, individuals from many of these tribal nations were forcibly removed or coerced to leave their homelands by the United States government,” said Milroy. “Many of these ancestral tribal members originally called Wisconsin home. Granting in-state tuition will remove a barrier to higher education, increase diversity on our campuses, and will be a step toward reconciliation.”

“Now, more than ever, our campuses need to recognize the contributions and benefits of tribal members pursuing an affordable higher education degree,” said Senator Smith. “This commonsense bill opens the door for more tribal member students to attend Wisconsin’s world-class public universities. Not only will this legislation provide a great opportunity for First Nation students, but it will also enrich the academic experience for all students on campus.”

“As an alumna of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, as Professor Emerita of UW-Extension, as an Honorary Fellow of the UW-Madison School of Human Ecology, and as a citizen of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe,” Patty Loew added. “I wholeheartedly endorse passage of a new exemption for students who are members of tribal entities recognized by and eligible for funding and services from the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs. As a land grant university, we owe a considerable debt to the Indigenous people of the land that became Wisconsin. Many of us have worked for years to receive this small concession of in-state tuition for the citizens of First Nations. It is an important gesture that begins to address the sacrifice Native Americans made so that the people of Wisconsin could prosper.”