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Cultural Diversity

City Council Meeting and Tobacco Free Policy

The meeting that I attended at the Tom Baker meeting room was quite interesting and a new experience for me. There were many things brought up that concerned the city of Bismarck and the people living in it. One of the topics that caught my attention was a woman who gave a brief presentation on how the tobacco free campus policy for the United Tribes Technical College was going. The policy was signed November 21, 2013 by Dr. David Gipp, and this makes the UTTC the third native college nationally to put a tobacco free policy in place on their campus. The policy does not go into effect until January 1, 2014. This caught my attention because it was one of the more obvious cultural references that evening held, and also because of the importance of tobacco to the Native American people in ceremonies and the like. Although the policy does not go into effect until the first of January, 2014, I was curious as to what was going on leading up to that. I looked at the United Tribes Technical College webpage, and as I thought, there was quite a bit about the policy and what it meant. On the website, there was an article discussing the importance of this policy, and Dr. Gipp talks about how each tribe has a story as to how tobacco came to be. The Native American people see tobacco as much more than just a casual enjoyment, but rather as an important thread to the tapestry of their culture. He continues on and says that with the increase of cigarette smoking, many of the young Native Americans have come to forgot about the importance of the tobacco, and that this policy will help keep tobacco sacred. That was an interesting point, because although a policy is being put in place to have a tobacco free campus, they see the policy as also helping keep the Native American traditions sacred and not secularized. Ironically, after his message, they shared a peace pipe to mark that important date, and it also showed that tobacco is a sacred thing, and something that should be respected and used in the ways that it was originally intended for. The traditional or sacred use of tobacco is exempt from this policy, again stressing the importance of it to the Native American people.

Also on this website was a series of frequently asked questions that could be read to better inform people who had questions about this new policy that was going to take place. The questions were about the policy itself and what it meant, as well as what the consequences were if someone were to violate this policy. The biggest thing that I got from this was that the importance of the traditional or sacred use of tobacco was stressed greatly. That makes sense, because as Dr. Gipp said, tobacco in cigarettes is just to addict people and it contains harmful substances that are not healthy to inhale. I think that it was a good thing to do for the campus, while still allowing the use of traditional or sacred tobacco for ceremonies with approval from a campus authority. I believe that this will help to show again the reasons for tobacco from the Native American point of view, and to try to extinguish the harmful effects and consequences of other forms of tobacco that do not have the same importance as the sacred tobacco does.