

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF THE
ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS**

**Eightieth Session
February 25, 2019**

The Committee on Government Affairs was called to order by Chair Edgar Flores at 9:04 a.m. on Monday, February 25, 2019, in Room 3143 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. Copies of the minutes, including the Agenda ([Exhibit A](#)), the Attendance Roster ([Exhibit B](#)), and other substantive exhibits, are available and on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and on the Nevada Legislature's website at www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/80th2019.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Assemblyman Edgar Flores, Chair
Assemblyman William McCurdy II, Vice Chair
Assemblyman Alex Assefa
Assemblywoman Bea Duran
Assemblyman John Ellison
Assemblywoman Michelle Gorelow
Assemblyman Gregory T. Hafen II
Assemblywoman Melissa Hardy
Assemblyman Glen Leavitt
Assemblywoman Susie Martinez
Assemblywoman Connie Munk

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

Assemblywoman Shannon Bilbray-Axelrod (excused)
Assemblyman Richard Carrillo (excused)

GUEST LEGISLATORS PRESENT:

None

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT:

Jered McDonald, Policy Analyst
Asher Killian, Committee Counsel
Kirsten Oleson, Committee Secretary
Trinity Thom, Committee Assistant

Minutes ID: 301



OTHERS PRESENT:

Sherry L. Rupert, Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission
Billie Jean Guerrero, Private Citizen, Nixon, Nevada
Aletha Tom, Private Citizen, Moapa, Nevada
Meg McDonald, Private Citizen, Carson City, Nevada
Angeleah Johnson-Kizer, Private Citizen, Carson City, Nevada
Marla McDade Williams, representing Reno Sparks Indian Colony
James R. Lawrence, Deputy Director, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Kristin Szabo, Administrator, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources,

Chair Flores:

[Rules and procedures for the Committee were explained.]

We have two items on the agenda. I will begin by inviting those who are here to testify for Assembly Bill 44 to speak.

Assembly Bill 44: Enacts provisions relating to the administration of the Stewart Indian School land and facilities. (BDR 18-188)

Sherry L. Rupert, Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission:

We will start off with a little bit about the Nevada Indian Commission (NIC) [page 2, ([Exhibit C](#))]. The Commission was established in 1965. The NIC is intended to be the liaison between the state and the 20 federally recognized tribes—composed of 27 separate tribes, bands, and community councils. The NIC assists state agencies and tribes on issues affecting Nevada's American Indian constituency. It also serves as a forum where American Indians' and Alaskan Natives' needs are considered and channeled through an appropriate network. We serve as a point of access between tribes and state government programs and policies. We have five full-time employees. The executive director is appointed by the Governor and a member of his cabinet. Our board consists of five members appointed by the Governor, and it includes three American Indians and two from the general public.

One of the highest priorities of the Nevada Indian Commission is to educate the public about the state's first citizens, our American Indian citizens. We educate others through the preservation and promotion of the Stewart Indian School. The Stewart Indian School was the only off-reservation boarding school in the state of Nevada. This is a photo [page 3] of the original school building. It was a wooden structure, but it is no longer there. It was replaced by the beautiful multicolored stone structures we have now. The school operated from 1890 to 1980. It was open for 90 years. The Stewart campus is one of the most intact Indian boarding schools across the nation. It is one of the most distinct for its architecture of stone buildings built by Hopi stonemasons and the students themselves. The site has national significance, which is why we have drafted a nomination application that will go to the National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior for consideration.

The Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum will provide an opportunity to tell a unique story. It is a story that is not taught in our schools. It is a story that has been swept under the rug and ignored. The cultural center will also make the public aware of the sacrifices that the American Indian people made. They have sacrificed so much. Not only were their homelands across the nation given up, but something even greater than that was forced to be given up: our families. We had to give up our children—tearing apart the family unit. They forced our children to take on new identities and shamed them into denying their culture and their languages—the one thing that sets us apart from others. When you are finally able to tell your story, maybe some healing can come.

The 2015 Session supported the Commission's efforts to preserve the Stewart Indian School. The session helped further the establishment of a welcome center, cultural center, and museum. In that session, the Nevada Indian Commission was designated as the coordinating state agency for the future use of and activity at the Stewart Indian School. This was important to establish, as the people who were most affected by the policies were the American Indian people—they should have some voice in its future. The session also approved a small operating budget for two new positions: a museum director and curator. These two positions began preparation for a welcome center, cultural center, and museum. A series of grants from the Commission For Cultural Centers and Historic Preservation funded the completion of the construction documents for the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center. During the 2015 Session, capital improvement funds approved the design and the construction documents for the welcome center. They also approved the master plan of the Stewart campus.

The master plan for the Stewart Indian School was completed in May of 2018. The plan includes an interpretive plan, a market study, a business plan, and a strategic plan. The plan presents a restored and reimagined historic campus that can be shared by alumni, local residents, and visitors in a way that recognizes the history of the institutions. The master plan provides a road map for restoration and creates a cultural heritage destination for future generations. Ultimately, this development ensures that this important experience in Native American history will be preserved.

The 2017 Session was a landmark session. Governor Sandoval included \$5.7 million in his budget for the Stewart Indian School. I am unaware of any boarding school project that is funded at this level by any other state. I am also not aware of any other boarding school project of this magnitude in the entire country. The capital improvement project funds provided \$1.2 million for a new roof on the old gym at Stewart—that is the bottom photo [page 6]. Also, \$4.5 million was designated for renovation of the former administration building, a post office, and a new welcome center in the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. Construction on these buildings started in August 2018 and is scheduled to be completed this summer. Fabrication and installation of the exhibits will be finished in fall of 2019. We have an expected grand opening in late 2019.

Why is Assembly Bill 44 so critical for the school's success? I have outlined how we have gotten to this critical point with the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. We

have made tremendous progress and we are on our way to further preserving one of the state's finest and most unique assets. We are on the cusp of creating a platform where the untold stories of thousands of American Indian children—who were taken from their homes—and families—who were made to take on new identities in an unfamiliar environment and culture—can finally have a voice. Assembly Bill 44 will legally establish the museum and will ensure its sustainability for future generations.

There currently is no language within the *Nevada Revised Statutes* that would give the authority to establish the museum. The statute would authorize the museum director to operate a state-funded museum. The statute would also allow revenue-producing activities such as museum stores, which sell gifts. The statute gives authority to the museum director to accept revenues generated from membership fees, admission fees, and from the sale of gifts and souvenirs. The statute would also create a petty cash account and change account for the museum stores. Finally, it would establish supervision of these activities by the executive director. We ask that this Committee consider the prior investment made by the State of Nevada. We would like to share this exceptional experience with the world. Please authorize the Nevada Indian Commission to move forward with the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum through the passage of A.B. 44.

We are not the only ones who are excited about the impending opening of the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. There have been recent articles and mentions of the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum. For example, the Smithsonian website recently did an article titled "From Lady Liberty to Hollywood to the Middle East, These are the Most Exciting Museums Opening in 2019" where they mentioned the Stewart Indian School. The Travel Channel also mentioned the opening of the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum in their article about Carson City titled "50 of the Most Charming Small Towns in America." Forbes.com did an article called "These Museums Are Opening in 2019". Who would have thought that the Stewart Indian School would be part of a Forbes article? Frommers.com did a recent article entitled "In Nevada, a School for Stolen Native American Kids Will Be a Museum."

Lastly, I will share our core message, the message we want everyone who visits the Stewart Indian School to take away. The Stewart Indian School changed the course of generations of American Indians. For more than 90 years, American Indian children were removed from their homelands, family, and culture which had profound impacts on their lives. The Stewart Indian School living legacy preserves their stories and cultural legacy—never to be forgotten. This concludes my presentation of A.B. 44.

Chair Flores:

We will open up the floor for questions.

Assemblyman Leavitt:

You briefly covered some of the funding you received for a new roof and the construction of some exhibits. What is the funding mechanism behind the day-to-day operation and the maintenance of the current buildings? How is this operation coming along?

Sherry Rupert:

Currently the budget we have is for two positions: the museum director, and the curator. The budget also provides a small operating budget that allows them to begin planning for the Cultural Center and Museum. They have done a really good job of drafting the policies and practices for the museum. They have taken a lot of time to go through the collections and catalog them. They have been working with a contractor/consultant on the exhibition for the Cultural Center and Museum. When we move forward with the opening of the Cultural Center and Museum, we will require operating funds. At this time, we do not have those operating funds.

Assemblyman Leavitt:

Is the museum currently operating? How do you keep the lights on? How do you pay the directors that are currently in place?

Sherry Rupert:

Right now the museum is not open; it is under construction. It will be completed early summer, then the exhibits will go in. The State Public Works Division in the Department of Administration is getting ready to send the consultant contract over to the State Board of Examiners for approval. If that gets approved, then we will move forward with fabrication of the exhibits. Fabrication will be completed early fall, and then we are hoping to open it. The building is not occupied at this point. Currently we do not have the money in the budget to open the building. We do not have the rent money nor do we have the money for the lights.

Assemblyman Ellison:

As I understand, then-Governor Sandoval authorized money to rebuild. I thought that that money would also go towards opening the new building—that was the intent of the financing. For several years now we have heard that they are going to open, and I think it is important that they do. If you do not have the money to start, are you going to try and get a grant or federal grant? What are you going to do so that you can open and start putting things in the building?

Sherry Rupert:

In regard to the \$4.5 million that we received for the cultural center and for the welcome center, those were capital improvement project funds—construction dollars—to finish those buildings. The operating budget is currently in discussion between the agency and the Office of Finance in the Office of the Governor. We are hopeful that we will come to an agreement.

Assemblyman Ellison:

So it is in the Governor's *Executive Budget* now?

Sherry Rupert:

We are in discussion with the Governor's Office of Finance regarding adding it to the budget.

Chair Flores:

Are there any additional questions? Seeing none, we will take those wishing to speak in support of the bill.

Billie Jean Guerrero, Private Citizen, Nixon, Nevada:

I am the museum director of the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe Museum and Visitors Center located in Nixon, Nevada. We are the only tribal museum in the state of Nevada. In 2019 we were nominated for a national medal for museums. That nomination was made by Senator Catherine Cortez Masto. We are very proud of that. I am here to speak in favor of A.B. 44 because it is important to teach and pass down the knowledge of our tribal people to the state of Nevada.

I am from the Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe, also a descendent of the Walker River Paiute Tribe. Within our museum we operate a gift shop. The gift shop is important because it brings in revenues so that we can be self-sustaining and continue to help share tribal information within the museum. I think that Assembly Bill 44 recognizing the Stewart Indian School and Cultural Center in statute will help to bring in revenues. I know that the Department of Tourism and Cultural Affairs helps to promote our museum as well as other places within the state of Nevada.

With the new Stewart Indian School and Cultural Center, it would be very wise to have additional staff to operate those. I have an attendant, a number of on-call employees, as well as myself working on staff at the Pyramid Lake Museum. As two regular employees, we are stretched very thin. Thank you. I hope you will vote in favor of A.B. 44.

Assemblyman Leavitt:

How are you operating at the Pyramid Lake Museum? Do you operate through grants, state funding, or just through revenue? How are you able to keep the lights on and pay the staff?

Billie Jean Guerrero:

Our museum operates from tribal funding that the tribal council appropriates each year. We also have a grant through the Institute of Museum and Library Services—it is a two-year grant that ends this year. We also bring in revenue through our gift shop, which helps us continue to purchase museum goods.

Chair Flores:

Are there any additional questions? Seeing none, we will continue with testifiers.

Aletha Tom, Private Citizen, Moapa, Nevada

I am with the Moapa Valley Paiute Tribe in the southern part of Nevada. I am here to testify on the uniqueness of the museum that is being established by the Nevada Indian Commission. In the state of Nevada I think it is very important that people are aware of the museum—specifically what happened in the years between the 1800s and the 1980s. I was one of the students there. I left the school in 1954. I went there when I was 12 years old. I think that this is not a simple museum. Why I call it a unique museum is because a lot of

students that went there were never asked to be there. I think you need to be aware of where we came from, how we learned to live and accept a way of life there on that campus.

When I was a young child at the school, I did not know that this day would come when I would sit before you at the Legislature and be able to talk to you about how it was and who I lived with. I did not live with my parents; I grew up with matrons. The boys had male advisors. I had to learn how to live there without my parents. I was not disciplined by my parents. I was disciplined by other people. I woke up on cold mornings with cold sheets. We never had sheets in my home. This place was a home to many of us; that is why it is so important. We are not asking for a grant. We are asking the state to fund and help budget this. This is something that I consider very important.

There are many other alumni that could not be here today. A lot of people who were in my class have passed on—three weeks ago we lost one. There are many stories that have to be told. Mrs. Guerrero's museum is totally different than this—it is tribal. This is a boarding school that the government established for us young people at that time. Please really think about how many of our young people had to grow up there. Now they are all old—some people are in 80s or 90s and some have passed on. I am 72, so it has been years ago since I last attended the school. I would like to be part of this now because I was a part of it then. I would like to help out in any way that I can. The budget is for our employees but what we really need is for all people to be aware of the school's history. There are people in the state of Nevada that did not know there was an Indian boarding school there. Take time to ride there and take a look at the place. My mother went there. She went there when she was 12 years old—the same age I was. So did my relatives that have all passed. Think about how important it was for us. I want you all to know what it is like, but you will never experience it like we did. You can only have a little knowledge about it. That is why it is important that you think about the positions and the money that we need. The staff there work very hard to get this process going. We come in, as alumni, to help the process along. It is not something that I want to talk about all the time. It is something that happened. It is a fact. That is all I have to say.

Chair Flores:

Thank you for reminding us of what we have here in Nevada.

Meg McDonald, Private Citizen, Carson City, Nevada:

I am a member of the Washoe Tribe and the Stewart Advisory Committee. I would like to say that I am in support of A.B. 44. I had numerous cousins who went to school there. I was lucky that I did not come from a broken home. Some of my cousins had broken homes. Some were just picked up and brought out there to go to school. I would like to see this bill passed.

Angeleah Johnson-Kizer, Private Citizen, Carson City, Nevada:

I was born and raised in Reno, Nevada. My father was one of the first students at Stewart Indian School. He would be well over 100 years old now. He passed away 30 days after I graduated high school. I started school in public school. Public schools are okay. They

give you a good foundation; however, I never fit in and I did not feel like I belonged there. Every single person in our family—my father, grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers, sisters, cousins—went to Stewart. A lot of them went there when things were really bad. When my dad went there, they would not let him speak his own language—which is part of the reason why I do not speak the language. A lot of these things were taken away, and it was not by choice.

Stewart offered us a lot of opportunities. My dad became a carpenter and built a lot of the buildings around Reno. My brother became an electrician and does a lot of wiring on the government buildings in Reno. He also does work on the freeways in Nevada. Stewart gave my aunt the opportunity to become a nurse. My aunt has been a nurse for well over 50 years. My cousin went directly into the military after going to Stewart Indian School. My uncles went to Vietnam. A lot of people who were forced here did not come back. To us, this is home. When you talk about Stewart Indian School, you talk about going home. Stewart Indian School is the heart of a lot of Native American communities because things were so bad back then. I did not go through that. I went to public schools, but I could not wait to get to Stewart. I love Stewart and I loved it.

I see a lot of the work that these women do now. Our campus is beautiful. It has been restored. A lot of the buildings are going back to their natural state. This is a gem in the state of Nevada. It is worth saving. A lot of these women are taking money out of their own pockets to work on the school. I donate a lot of my time to do decorating. I am a seamstress and I sew a lot of things. A lot of these things I have been doing for free. I feel very guilty having to ask them to pay me back for the supplies. Our school is worth saving. My uncles talk about Stewart Indian School all the time. This is our heart. This is where we are happy. These women put their heart and soul into saving our school and the buildings—keeping it pristine and beautiful. This is something that our entire state should be proud of.

As far as boarding schools go, we were not a missionary school. We did not have the religious people coming in and abusing our kids. We have had it hard enough. Stewart was our stronghold that allowed us to become the people that we are today. I graduated from a public school. My father wanted me to walk across that stage for Stewart Indian School, but they closed the school before I could get there. I wanted that and my entire family wanted that. It makes me proud right now because I still live here. I met my husband at Stewart Indian School. I went to school there when I was 14 years old. I came from Wooster High School in Reno, Nevada. At Stewart School I felt like I was home and I thrived. I was able to go to college and earn a living. For a lot of our native people, that was important. We did not have all the same opportunities that we have now. It is worth preserving and worth saving. Many people have put their entire lives into this. They have committed themselves to saving this school, but they need help. With the passage of A.B. 44, you make that possible.

Every single one of you here has a voice, just like we do. All the students that went to Stewart Indian School have a voice that needs to be heard. Now is the time when we have the media. Please help us preserve the school by passing A.B. 44. Passing this bill would

allow these women to do their job as well as it would make the entire state proud of who we are. Stewart Indian School is worth saving. It makes us all proud. It was a good thing and it still is a good thing. On behalf of myself, my father, my grandpas, my aunties and uncles, thank you very much for your time.

Marla McDade Williams, representing Reno Sparks Indian Colony:
We want to go on record in support of this bill.

Chair Flores:

Is there anyone else wishing to speak? Seeing none, is there anyone wishing to speak in opposition? Seeing none, is there anyone wishing to speak in the neutral position? Seeing none, please make your closing remarks.

Sherry Rupert:

I have been with the Nevada Indian Commission for 14 years. All those years we have been working on this particular project. As you can see, it is very important to the alumni. It is also very important to the state of Nevada. This is an opportunity to share untold stories to the rest of the world. We are creating something that is unique to the state of Nevada. There were many boarding schools across the nation. I have visited several of them. None of them are like the Stewart Indian School. None of the schools have the beautiful multicolor stone structures. None of the schools are of the same magnitude that we are—the 110 acres and 65 buildings that are still intact from that era. We are going to be able to tell this story far and wide through this beautiful campus here in the state of Nevada. We are all really excited about that opportunity. You all have been supportive and have invested public funds into the facility. We are asking so that we can cross the finish line and get the Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum up and running. Thank you.

Chair Flores:

I am going to close out the hearing on A.B. 44. I would like to invite up the presenters of Assembly Bill 52.

Assembly Bill 52: Creates the Division of Natural Heritage within the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. (BDR 18-217)

James R. Lawrence, Deputy Director, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:

In preparation for this legislative session, we were taking a look at the statutes relating to our department to see if there was anything that needed to be cleaned up. We realized that this program is not recognized in the statutes for how it functions. We look at this as an administrative housekeeping bill.

Kristin Szabo, Administrator, Nevada Natural Heritage Program, State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources:

I am pleased to be here in support of Assembly Bill 52. If passed, the bill will formally recognize the Nevada Natural Heritage Program in statute as a division within the State Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The mission of the Nevada Natural Heritage Program is to develop and maintain a cost-effective, centralized information source and inventory of the locations, biology, and conservation status of all imperiled plants and animals in Nevada. Our data is used by a variety of public and private entities to help minimize costly resource conflicts and to streamline federally mandated environmental reviews. The use of our data assists in quick, efficient, and informed land-use and conservation decisions.

Assembly Bill 52 clarifies existing statutory language by specifically recognizing the Natural Heritage Program as a division. The bill also provides a general outline of our existing duties which include maintaining data on locations; biology; conservation status of plant, animal species, and ecosystems; providing expertise in the areas of zoology, botany, and community ecology—including wetlands. This is, for all intents and purposes, a housekeeping bill. The program has been functioning as a division within the department since 1995 and has had an unclassified administrator since 2005. We are not requesting any new positions or authorities; therefore, Assembly Bill 52 has no fiscal impact. We feel that it is important for statutes to accurately reflect how the program functions within the department.

Chair Flores:

In terms of applying for grants, can you discuss how you think this may benefit you?

Jim Lawrence:

We think that it is important to clarify the duties in statutes—particularly when it comes to grant opportunities. Recently the program was very successful in getting a grant for about half a million dollars for wetlands inventory—which is very critical to species in the state. I have found that when we are seeking grant opportunities, it is important to be able to point to something in statute as a specific authority—whether it is a federal grant or even internal to the state system. If you cannot point to something that specifically says it is an authority, it can be difficult.

Chair Flores:

Seeing no one in support of this bill, we will continue with those wishing to speak in opposition of A.B. 52. Seeing none, we will open it for those wishing to speak in the neutral position. Seeing none, we will finish with closing remarks.

Jim Lawrence:

Again, this is a housekeeping bill.

Chair Flores:

We will now close out the hearing on A.B. 52 and open up the floor for public comment. Seeing none, this meeting is adjourned [at 9:47 a.m.].

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Kirsten Oleson
Committee Secretary

APPROVED BY:

Assemblyman Edgar Flores, Chair

DATE: _____

EXHIBITS

[Exhibit A](#) is the Agenda.

[Exhibit B](#) is the Attendance Roster.

[Exhibit C](#) is a copy of a PowerPoint presentation titled "Stewart Indian School Cultural Center and Museum," presented by Sherry L. Rupert, Executive Director, Nevada Indian Commission.