

Tatanka Wasaka "Ryan Wilson" Biography

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Named by his hunka grandparents Matt and Nellie Two Bulls shortly before Matt's passing in 1996, Tatanka Wasaka's grandparents chose his name because of his many years of dedication to Indian youth and leadership in protecting Indian children.

Ryan is from the Wilson Tiospaye of Number 4. Ryan is the grandson of the late George Wilson, Sr. (Oglala Lakota) a WWII Veteran and the late Mary Dixon (Oglala Lakota). Ryan is the son of the late Roberta Wilson (Oglala Lakota) and stepson of Crawford White, Sr. (Northern Arapaho). Along with his companion Vonnie Alberts he is the proud father of five children, in addition to four step-children, and two grandchildren.

Ryan's experiences are deeply rooted in his mother's love for education and love for her people. He is also heavily influenced by his father Crawford's ceremonial discipline. Ryan's mother, a life-long educator was instrumental in the early days of the tribal college movement and worked tirelessly to secure passage of the **Tribally Controlled Colleges Act** during the formative years of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. His mother believed deeply in Tribal colleges and especially the launching of Oglala Lakota College where she served as adjunct faculty. His father Crawford is a decorated combat Vietnam Veteran and ceremonial leader of the Northern Arapaho tribe – he engendered in Ryan a great sense of respect and adherence to traditional practices and core beliefs and values.

Through these beliefs and teachings Ryan has excelled as a national leader in the fields of education, Native youth advocacy and language revitalization. Ryan chaired Indian Country's oldest and largest Native youth organization the Northwest Indian Youth Conference for many years. He was a catalyst in the founding of the **National Congress of American Indians Youth Commission**, and long time organizer of the National Indian Education Association youth day. Ryan is a recognized leader in the Native American Boys and Girls Clubs movement and has advocated tirelessly for the expansion of Native clubs and greater resources. In 2005 First Lady Laura Bush invited Ryan to participate in the Inaugural "White House Conference on Helping Americas Youth." Whether as a court advocate, drug and alcohol counselor, cultural director, GED instructor, or executive director of Indian Boys and Girls Clubs Ryan has devoted his entire professional career to the advancement and development of Indian youth and children.

Ryan was elected vice-president of the National Indian Education Association in 2000. In 2005 he was elected president and after another election to the NIEA board in 2008 he retired from the board in 2010. For nearly 10 years he served in a leadership position on the board and a champion for Indian education. Ryan successfully shielded Indian country from anti Indian sentiments on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. in the wake of the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal.

He also developed a legislative strategy and implemented a fierce assault to stem the tide of President Bush budget cuts and Congressional budget cuts to the Indian education budget. Ryan worked diligently on BIA/BIE school construction funding and stood shoulder to shoulder with various Pine Ridge school boards and administrators to protect our construction projects and ensure their rightful place on the school construction list.

In 2005 Ryan launched the **NIEA Native Language Revitalization Initiative** within one year of launching this initiative he successfully secured passage of the **Esther Martinez Native American Languages Preservation Act**. Housed in the Administration for Native Americans this Act created greater funding opportunities for language revitalization efforts, currently several ANA funded language programs are being implemented here on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Native language funding has accelerated from an average of 1.5 million annually to over 12 million annually as a result of Ryan's leadership.

Ryan was appointed by U.S. Senator Tom Daschle to serve on the **Senate Democrat Native American Leadership Forum in 2004 to develop Indian Country Policy Recommendations for the 109th Congress**. He worked with tribal leaders and United States Senators Ted Kennedy, Harry Reid, Hillary Clinton and Byron Dorgan to establish Indian education priorities. While many friends of Indian country are no longer in Congress he maintains very close ties with the Senate Democratic Caucus. Ryan would

later testify before Congress and the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on education issues and Native children. Always referring to treaty based educational rights and treaty based appropriations.

As president of NIEA, Ryan presented the inaugural "**State of Indian Education Address**," nationally televised on C-Span. This speech brought national attention to the needs of Indian education and the conditions of Native children and youth. The speech was widely viewed by members of Congress and staff and contributed greatly to broad based support for culturally based education and continued funding levels for Indian education in the poisonous atmosphere of intense budget cuts. In a Republican controlled House of Representatives, US Senate and White House Indian education survived budget cuts relatively unscathed. In a tough English only environment and era of No Child Left Behind, Ryan was able to move Congress on two crucial pieces of legislation the Esther Martinez language bill and the Native **American Code Talker Recognition Act**. Calling Clarence Wolf Guts into action one more time, Ryan and Clarence lobbied side by side for passage of the act that would acknowledge Lakota and other tribal Code Talkers for their contributions in WWI and WWII.

In 2005 Ryan founded the **National Congress of American Indians and National Indian Education Association Tribal Leaders Education Task Force** codifying for the first time a permanent venue for tribal leaders to advance the Indian education agenda. For two years he chaired the NCAI Human Resources Committee and Indian Education Sub Committee. Ryan has devoted many years to working with tribal leaders and is respected by tribal leaders throughout Indian country.

The **National Alliance to Save Native Languages** was founded by Ryan in 2006 and the organization is credited with elevating federal appropriations for Native language efforts and advancing policies that promote Native languages. As president of the National Alliance Ryan has worked closely with Congress and the Whitehouse to protect and promote a place for Native languages in contemporary society. This is exemplified in the Native Language provisions in the recent **White House Executive Order on Indian Education and the Pending Native Class Act**.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and Education Secretary Arne Duncan appointed Ryan to a panel of Indian education experts to advise the Secretaries on Indian education policy in 2009. At this roundtable Ryan sternly warned the Secretaries that it would be folly to move the Bureau of Indian Education into the Department of Education. Ryan later orchestrated the **Department of Education and Interior Indian Education Consultation hearing at Pine Ridge High School in 2010**. This hearing was historic in nature for it was the first ever Department of Education consultation hearing and marked an important commitment of the Obama Administration to hold hearings on Indian lands. Ryan has been both a formal and informal advisor to the Department of Education and Interior as well as the Whitehouse on Indian education issues.

Ryan Graduated with a BA in Political Science from the University of Washington in 2002 completing the last seven academic quarters on the Dean's List and receiving numerous academic honors. He is a smallbusiness owner and supports dozens of artists on the Pine Ridge Indian reservation who specialize in traditional Lakota Arts.

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