

## **Tatanka Wasaka “Ryan Wilson”**

Ryan is a member of the Oglala band of the Tituwan Oceti Sakowin, and is from the Wilson Tiospaye. 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).

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 help secure passage of the **Tribally Controlled Colleges Act** during the formative years of the American Indian Higher Education Consortium. 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 served as a 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.

He developed a legislative strategy and implemented a fierce counter 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 Tribally Controlled school boards and administrators to protect BIE construction projects.

In 2005 Ryan launched the **NIEA Native Language Revitalization Initiative** within one year of starting this initiative NIEA 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. Native language funding has accelerated from an average of 1.5 million annually to over 12 million annually as a result of NIEA leadership on this issue.

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 109<sup>th</sup> 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 as well as Republican leadership. 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, NIEA was able to move Congress on two crucial pieces of legislation the Esther Martinez language bill and the **Native American Code Talker Recognition Act**.

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.

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**.

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. 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.