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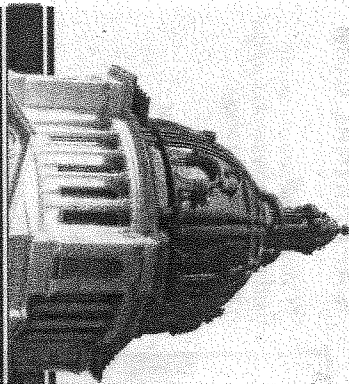
ISSUE NO. 41

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# Capital Journal

WWW.CAPJOURNAL.COM

THE VOICE OF SOUTH DAKOTA SINCE 1891



## LePlante to build tribal, SD relations

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FORT PIERRE — Leroy “T.R.” LePlante was honored on Tuesday as the first secretary of tribal relations, a position Gov. Dennis Daugaard created this year.

LePlante will be the first cabinet-level member of the Department of Tribal Relations.

He will serve to re-emphasize the importance of Native American issues and foster a better relationship between the state and the nine tribes within South Dakota.

Gov. Daugaard

said on multiple occasions that one of his major goals is to create better relationships with the tribes. He also emphasized he will strive to cultivate relationships with all nine tribes separately while trying to work together and respect the culture.

“I promise to build stronger relations with tribal leaders,” said Daugaard at the ceremony, which



**LEROY LEPLANTE**



## Wakpa

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was held at Wakpa Sica Reconciliation Place in Fort Pierre. “We will meet first as people and not as negotiators.”

South Dakota is the only state in the nation that has a secretary of tribal relations, according to Daugaard. The governor said he was “ignorant” about the Native culture and hoped to learn more through communications with tribes.

“We need to remember that we are mutually tied to the citizens of South Dakota... both Indian and non-Indian,” said LePlante.

LePlante said he hopes to turn a new page in history and focus on something that will make life for

all South Dakotans better.

LePlante was named secretary of tribal relations on Feb. 11, but previously maintained a law practice in Vermillion, with an emphasis on Native American law. He is a graduate of the University of South Dakota School of Law with a bachelor’s degree from Carson-Newman College in Tennessee.

“If I did not know that the governor was serious in his intentions to improve tribal relations, I wouldn’t have taken this job,” said LePlante. “I really get the impression that the people are behind us.”

Some of the goals LePlante said he has are to create a work plan for tribal relations and take some tours of the reservations for tribes to meet with the

governor.

He also hopes to have a tribal state summit in the future for everyone to come together.

LePlante served as chief judge and court administrator for Crow Creek Sioux Tribe in Fort Thompson and is the former administrative officer for the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe.

Daugaard said one goal of his was to work to reduce the rate of infant mortality, especially on the reservations.

Daugaard said more than 35 people applied for this position and he felt LePlante had a “wealth of experience” and knowledge to contribute.

“We needed a special person to be tribal secretary,” said Daugaard.