

Published April 06, 2011, 04:31 PM

Feds indict Spirit Lake leader for fuel assistance fraud

An official of the Spirit Lake Tribe at Fort Totten, N.D., has been charged in federal court with embezzling federal funds in the low-income fuel assistance program on the reservation at Devils Lake.

By: [Stephen J. Lee](#), Grand Forks Herald

An official of the Spirit Lake Tribe at Fort Totten, N.D., has been charged in federal court with embezzling federal funds in the low-income fuel assistance program on the reservation at Devils Lake.

U.S. Attorney Tim Purdon told the Herald today that Patricia Robertson, also known as Patti Cavanaugh, appeared in federal court in Grand Forks Tuesday on the charge of embezzlement and theft from an Indian tribal organization.

A grand jury indicted Robertson on the charges, which allege that between October 2007 and when she was arrested this week, Robertson, coordinator for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program of the Spirit Lake Tribe, "did knowingly and willfully embezzle, steal and misapply property, that is, money, funds and credits" belonging to the program with a value of more than \$1,000.

The fuel assistance program receives block grant funds from the federal Department of Health and Human Services, according to the indictment, that was made public today.

An employee of the Spirit Lake Tribe told the Herald several other tribal members have been arrested in connection with allegations of fuel assistance fraud, including tribal leaders.

Purdon's office, as a matter of policy, does not comment on or confirm whether investigations in cases include other, still-unsealed indictments, which typically are not made public until a defendant appears in court.

But a court official said more information on the case involving Robertson likely would be forthcoming this week.

Attempts to reach Robertson today at her office and home were unsuccessful.

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