Welcome everybody to what promises to be a thought-provoking view of contemporary issues regarding Native Americans.

Welcome again to our campus Chief Froman and Second Chief Dollarhide. We are extremely honored by your visit and your continued support of Illinois.

These gentlemen have traveled here from Oklahoma because they felt it was critical at this time in our university’s history to educate us about real chiefs and to talk to us about the Peoria Nation.

This is a critical event for our campus.

Just as Edgar Heap of Birds’ public art piece on campus titled “Beyond the Chief” has been showing us, there is another part of America that demands our attention, a population with roots in this country deeper than ours and that calls out for respect and justice. These are Americans often misunderstood, and even romanticized at times to the point of extinction.

And we here at Illinois, we of all people, should listen.

It’s no secret that we need to do a better job of recruiting Native American students and faculty members to our campus and, even more importantly, that we have a campus where those students—especially undergraduate students—and faculty members feel comfortable.

Campus climate is a way to measure success at Illinois. Simply put, if students and faculty do not feel comfortable then we have failed.

We must and we will do more. That is why when I was provost I put in funding for two post doc positions in the American Indian Studies Program. I knew then that the American Indian Studies Program and the Native American House are integral to the mission of this university.

Under the directorship of Robert Warrior those two entities are helping us take the next important step together. Through programs like this one tonight they are teaching us to respect our differences and celebrate our commonalities. Each day they make us a stronger university.

That is why I welcome uncomfortable, sometimes painful discussions about divisive issues such as race and, yes, Chief Illiniwek.

That is the reason I launched the One Campus Many Voices Initiative in 2007. I truly want this campus to be the place where we confront our differences in the spirit of civility and openness. If we cannot accomplish this here, at this great public university with its 142-year history then, again, we have not been successful in our core mission.
We must do this because I believe that you don’t create community by simply erasing conflict or sweeping it under a rug.

Instead, I believe we have the responsibility to push and define new boundaries. We cannot run from this obligation. Nor can we run from controversy.

Indeed, there is no place to run to anymore.

It is time to face each other and initiate those conversations we have been avoiding. It is time to listen to each other, really listen with respect, with open hearts, and, this is so important, listen with civility.

Wisdom does not come from suppression. Wisdom comes from ideas that are tested in civil debate. If we are successful, we will create the next generation of free-speech practitioners, indeed, the next generation of American leaders.

Finally, in the Edgar Heap of Birds’ statement about the Beyond the Chief exhibit, he writes: “A chief is far beyond one person and should reflect an honor and allegiance—as well as truth, tradition, listening, openness, and good way—to a whole people.”

We should all feel honored to have two such men here with us tonight.

Thank you.