

Chief Earl Old Person (Blackfeet)

STATE-TRIBAL RELATIONS COMMITTEE
CASEY PALLISTER – DECEMBER 2025



Background

Chief Earl Old Person was born on February 12, 1937, on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation in Montana. He was raised in a traditional Blackfeet cultural environment and grew up learning the customs, language, and history of his people. Old Person became the chairman of the Blackfeet Nation in 1978 and served in that role for over four decades, becoming one of the longest-serving tribal leaders in U.S. history. Throughout his life, he was a steadfast advocate for indigenous rights, cultural preservation, and economic development for the Blackfeet Nation. He passed away in 2021.

Leadership and Advocacy

During his tenure, Chief Old Person was pivotal in negotiating land and resource rights with the U.S. government, helping secure the tribe's sovereignty and economic stability. Chief Old Person was a strong advocate for Indigenous rights, playing a key role in protecting the tribe's lands from external threats and supporting policy changes that benefited the Blackfeet Nation.

Cultural Preservation, Education, & Economic Growth

Chief Old Person actively supported the revival and maintenance of Blackfeet traditions, including language programs and cultural events, ensuring that younger generations stayed connected to their heritage. He championed educational initiatives, such as scholarships and partnerships with schools, and worked to improve economic opportunities for the tribe, fostering long-term growth and self-sufficiency.



Legacy

Chief Earl Old Person is remembered as a dedicated and influential leader. His legacy was further honored by SB 120, signed by Gov. Gianforte in April 2023, designating a portion of Highway 89 as the Chief Earl Old Person Memorial Highway.



¹ Photo sources: U.S Dept. of Agriculture, NBC Montana, Casey Pallister