

State of the Tribes Address

April 12, 2011

Mr. Speaker, President of the Senate, majority and minority leaders, members of the Legislature, Constitutional officers, Supreme Court Justices, cabinet leaders, and guests:

Weweni Boozhoo
Muckaday Moqua, nind-izhinikaaz
Muqua, nindodem
Mashkii-Ziibii nindonjibaa
In a good way I say Welcome
My Ojibwe name is Black Bear
I am Bear Clan and I am from the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.

My name is Michael Wiggins Jr. and it is an honor to be here with you today. It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to address you on behalf of the 11 federally recognized Indian tribes in Wisconsin, and the Lac Vieux Desert Chippewa tribe from Watersmeet, Michigan.

Before I go any further, I would like to give thanks to the veterans acting as color guard, to Bob Powless, Bad River Elder and Spiritual Advisor, for the invocation, and to Brianna Pero, eighth grade student from Bad River, for leading us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge and introduce to you the leaders of the Indian Nations present today.

Forest County Potawatomi Community
James Crawford, Vice Chairman

Ho-Chunk Nation
President Wilfrid Cleveland

Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
Chairman Louis Taylor

Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
President Tom Maulson

Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
Chairman Alan Shively

Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
Randal Chevalier Chairman

Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin
Chairman Richard Hill

Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
Chairwoman Rose Soulier

St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
Chairman Lewis Taylor

Sokaogon Chippewa Community
Chairman Garland McGeshick

Stockbridge-Munsee Community
Council Member Scott Vele

(Acknowledgement of elders and veterans)

For the past six years the tribes located in Wisconsin have been coming to Madison at the invitation of the joint legislative leadership to speak with you regarding issues in our tribal communities. The State of the Tribes address is an important day that underscores the government-to-government relationship that exists between the 11 sovereign Tribes and the State of Wisconsin.

Each Tribal Leader who is here today, represents a beautiful sovereign nation that is autonomous, complex, and unique in its tribal heritage and identity. We do share many commonalities that strengthen and bond us, but there are also differences between our tribes--economic, social, and cultural. It is the differences and uniqueness of each sovereign tribe that really underscores the importance of government-to-government relationships. Each tribe has its own unique story and ultimately its own unique level of need and administrative capacity. Today we come here united in the reaffirmation of how important our Tribes view the government-to-government relationship that we have with the State of Wisconsin. The Tribes do not take this relationship for granted, and understand that, like all relationships, it takes work, commitment and perseverance to grow and strengthen what we have.

In our State of the Tribes address last, year Chairman Taylor from St. Croix relayed the “shared victories” that can result from meaningful discussion and work from our governments. Shared victories such as the codification of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the mutual aid bill in the law enforcement realm were two gleaming examples of good work between the Tribes and the State of Wisconsin. In summary, last year’s State of the Tribes address was celebratory and appreciative, in that the partnership, the government-to-government relationship between Wisconsin and the Tribes, produced positive outcomes that reflected the power of “choosing” to work together. Let us resolve to keep the lines of communication filled with integrity, filled with meaningful dialogue and work.

An example of a proactive Tribal-State relationship can be found in the health services realm. The Wisconsin Indian Tribes and the Department of Health Services have established a unique cooperative relationship to improve the health and well being of Wisconsin tribal communities. This relationship began as tribal governments contracted with the Department to provide health and human services in their communities. Today, in addition to the contractual relationship, the Department and tribal governments have developed a collaborative, government-to-government relationship. I’d like to highlight a few of the achievements from this proactive partnership.

- DHS and tribal representatives established a consolidated approach to tribal social service programs. Consolidation merged 13 children and family focused programs in a single Family Services Program (FSP). The FSP provides the fiscal and program flexibility to meet the unique needs of each tribal community.

- DHS is developing technical assistance processes that will assist interested tribes in establishing MA reimbursable behavioral health programs such as Comprehensive Community Services, Targeted Case Management and Community Support Programs. These programs offer an opportunity to generate additional federal funding as well as improve the quality of behavioral health services to tribal communities.

- After several years of consultation, DHS and tribal Health Directors have developed a strategy to maximize federal revenue to health clinics. This effort will increase federal Medicaid reimbursement through improved cost reporting, billing for pharmacy encounters, training of clinic staff, and provision of technical assistance by a consulting firm.

In these examples of cooperation between DHS and the tribes, we can see creative approaches to save money and an overall spirit of streamlining and efficiency to meet specific needs in our communities.

Tribal leaders face the same challenge that the leadership of Wisconsin faces, trying to improve the quality of life for our people with dwindling resources and budget challenges. The types of budget topics that are being considered today are rather unpleasant and mired in controversy. Like Wisconsin, many tribal budget meetings have centered around the need for fiscal conservancy, the need to create jobs, and the unmet needs of the people we serve. Our tribal nations feel the effects of today's economy and the evolving political landscape. We feel the effects of rising health care costs; we see the unemployment numbers and feel the burden of our people who are struggling; we shoulder the rising costs of gas and energy and feel its effects in all aspects of our Nations; and we recognize that we are all falling short at fulfilling the unmet needs of OUR people within this State. Today the sovereign tribes come with a message for the leadership of Wisconsin: we are committed to communication, meeting the unmet needs of our people, and caring for the environment.

Governor Walker has pledged to create 250,000 jobs for the State of Wisconsin. The Tribes echo the need to create more jobs. Back in 1987 through 1991 the tribes were a powerful engine for job creation and development, and since then, tribes have become one of the largest, if not the largest employers in their respective counties. This development has extended far beyond the reservation boundaries. Our government and business enterprises directly employ over 18,000 people. Indirectly the tribes positively impact suppliers, contractors, service providers and small businesses. Our estimate is that there are at least 100,000 other jobs that are indirectly impacted in a positive way through the administration of our tribal government and enterprises. And to those who would claim that Indian tribes and tribal members do not pay taxes, I would point out that tribes pay over \$87 million dollars in State and federal employment and withholding taxes.

Local governments and civic organizations depend on tribal contributions for operations funds. Some local governments rely on nearby tribal governments for government services. Tribal health funds support local clinics, while tribal clinics in turn serve local health needs well beyond the boundaries of our reservations.

The tribes also contribute to the betterment of all people in Wisconsin in other ways. Tourism is a huge business for Wisconsin as it is for the tribes. The reality of the last several years is that the Wisconsin State Budget relies on the gaming contributions from our tribal nations for funding the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. The Tribes recognize the importance of tourism to the State's economy and \$9.6 million of tribal gaming contributions support Wisconsin's entire tourism marketing efforts, fully two-thirds of the entire Department of Tourism budget.

The national Native American tourism association had its beginnings in Wisconsin, and the Native American Tourism of Wisconsin organization which first received funds from the State in the last biennial budget, has been a partner with the State in promoting long distance and foreign heritage tourism for years.

To showcase an example of the good work that NATOW and others have done, I would like to say the tribes are united in our excitement about the Indigenous Games that will be held this summer in Milwaukee on July 10 -14. The Indigenous Games will be a five day event that will feature games and competition for Native youth to showcase their talents in a variety of sports and activities. This event will also generate positive cash flow in the form of tourism based spending as tens of thousands of people descend on Milwaukee for this event.

All this is by way of saying that the State and the Tribes are partners in economic development and in the creation and preservation of jobs. We have mutual interests in seeing the development of good, sustainable jobs. As we move forward now, our tribal interests and our history of job creation make us a natural partner in the business of the new Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation.

In the interest of new partnership, I can speak on behalf of the tribes in Wisconsin in saying that relationships begin with learning about each other. There may be some among you who don't know about the vitality of our reservation communities. We invite you to come to our communities and to engage with us in a dialogue and exchange of ideas.

Chairman Chevalier from the Menominee Tribe shared this with me regarding economic development Ideas: "The Menominee Tribe through its recently established Menominee Indian Economic Development Charter, has taken a more formal and concerted approach towards expanding and diversifying the economic development opportunities available to us in local, regional, state, national and international markets. We are very excited about our possibilities"

Chairman Maulson from Lac du Flambeau shared this with me: "In addition to gaming, the Lac du Flambeau tribal government boasts Simpson Electric, a tribal enterprise that has been in existence since 1960. Simpson Electric provides employment to 84 native and nonnative community members. We are considering possible expansion in the near future."

Chairwoman Soulier from Red Cliff told me that her Tribe "is very excited about its new casino hotel development which sits on the pristine shores of Lake Superior. This project will enhance the economies of the communities from the extreme northern parts of Wisconsin, whom are far too often forgotten when the debates are taking place in these very chambers."

Chairman Hill from Oneida shared that, of the nearly 3,000 employees at the Oneida Tribe, about half are employed in the gaming industry while the other half work in governmental services, healthcare, the school system or other tribal programs.

The Oneida Tribe owns numerous enterprises. The Radisson Hotel and Conference Center, the Wingate Inn near Austin Straubel Airport, Thornberry Creek at Oneida, Oneida One Stop and Smoke Shop retail chains, Oneida Total Integrated Systems and engineering firm and Oneida Seven Generations Corporation, a business and economic diversification company. Additional business ventures include the Oneida Nation farms, Tsyunhehkwa, Apple Orchard and Oneida Museum.

Tribes invest in tourism and hospitality on and off the reservations, exemplified by tribal investments in Green Bay, Stevens Point, Madison, and other cities.

Again we are committed to communication, meeting the unmet needs of our people, and caring for the environment. And we know we are not alone in this effort to create a better life and build a stronger community. Balancing the notions of job creation and caring for the environment is a consideration the tribes take very seriously.

As an example of how this issue plays out in Indian Country, I would like to speak to the exploratory drilling being done by an open pit mining operation in an area that encompasses 23 waterways that flow directly into my homeland, the Bad River Reservation. First, I'd like to share a few words about where I come from. In the north country of Wisconsin, on the shores of Lake Superior, you will find my homeland the Bad River Reservation. In our neck of the woods, Woodruff and Minocqua are referred to as "down south" and Wausau is referred to as "way down there." My reservation has an incredible base of isolated wilderness and cold clean water flowing through pristine waterways and unbelievable wetlands.

We have miles of white sand beaches and Lake Superior shoreline. Miles of incredible water frontage that are undeveloped and left intact for future generations to discover, enjoy, and love. My people value environmental protection and preservation and shoulder the sacrifice that it takes to keep our land and tribal waters clean. In a paradoxical way, Bad River is financially poorer than other tribes on account of how rich we are. Bad River's land and waters sustain my people, the culture, and our identity. Our lands and waters define who we are as Ojibwe people and ultimately encapsulate the hope and optimism we feel when we think of those generations yet to come.

I'm telling you about the environmental riches of the Bad River reservation and the spirit of stewardship we internalize, because I want to illuminate an issue that seems to be haunting the notion of launching mining initiatives in Northern Wisconsin. In a book called *Runes of the North* written by the famous naturalist and environmental steward Sigurd Olson, he relates a story how, while paddling in pristine waters and wilderness, he experienced a paradigm shift, a change in thinking. Olson wrote "This untamed sound, the distances, the feeling of mystery and adventure filled me with elation and joy. Here to my young mind was the threshold of the wild, and what Kipling meant in something lost beyond the ranges." Olson went on to describe feelings of wonderment, awe, and connection to trees, rocks, water, and open horizons. Then he and his companions encounter a camp of timber cruisers. Olson wrote "these practical men told us they were cruising timber and that all the magnificent pine around the lakes was destined for the mills." He wrote "Somehow I felt I should tell them what we had seen and how we felt, but the words stuck in my throat. To them the trees were cut and already in the rafts.....they were so matter-of-fact about what they were doing, there seemed no question but that logging was right." In his internal struggle to negotiate the spectrum of emotion he was experiencing Olson said "the very thought of it seemed unreal. Suddenly we were confused and something lost beyond the ranges sounded childish in the face of what these men could do."

I've listened to talk of economics, jobs, infrastructure, and practicality as it relates to mining in Northern Wisconsin. I have heard many give a ringing endorsement of such endeavors at any price, monetary or environmental. What has been remarkably absent is public discourse on the environmental consequences and ultimately the risks that we already know to be associated with open pit mining. Perhaps the wonder and awe that can accompany quiet places and wilderness is easily lost or hard to hold unto when confronted with the prospect of practicality. Perhaps ground water is not an incredibly weighted issue for consideration in public discourse because most will never see where the water they drink actually comes out of the ground. Or perhaps it's like how Sigurd Olson described the practical men he encountered 48 years ago, "...they were so matter of fact about what they were doing, there seemed to be no question but that [it] was right."

The tribes are compelled through a unified value system based in culture and our worldview as it pertains to the environment, to see beyond ringing endorsements and ultimately well beyond some industrialization. Industrialization with unquantified and undetermined environmental risks.

The Tribes recognize that threats to surface water, ground water, air quality, and ultimately our Anishinabe way of life sound a call to action, a call to protect and preserve what we have for future generations. I would like to add here that when I say future generations, I also mean the progeny of all people from Wisconsin, tribal and non-tribal. Wisconsinites along with the Tribes share a history that is deeply connected to the waters and forests of this State. I believe that manifests itself in what many describe as a "northwoods spirit."

Many tribes express their goals as preserving their promise and duty to the seventh generation. We must balance development and job creation, with due regard for Mother Earth and our people to the seventh generation. To realize that, the tribes expect communication and negotiation in matters that affect our people, our reservations, our governments, and our Ceded Territory interests and rights. We have seen what good can come when the tribes and State can agree on resource management interests and goals. Through cooperation between the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission and the Department of Natural Resources our fish and wildlife stocks are healthier and more abundant. Through cooperation in conservation and law enforcement, our communities became safer. When it comes to economic development, it is the tribes' hope that this cooperation will continue, and that tribes will be present in discussions, planning, and oversight.

There have been recent maneuvers in Legislative initiatives that we would like to touch base on and highlight. We are aware that part of the legislative agenda in this session includes further requirements of voter security, namely a requirement of photo identification. The tribes have been interested in this requirement, and have pointed out that our tribal governments also issue photo identification cards. If photo identification cards are going to become a statutory requirement for voting in Wisconsin, it is simply a matter of government-to-government recognition and cooperation that tribal photo identification should be an acceptable form as well as state-issued identification. We are happy to say that attention is being devoted to this on all sides, that the bill drafters have sought tribal input, and that a forthcoming bill will include provision for this. This is another model for legislative cooperation that will surely be envied, if not replicated, in many other states.

We want to thank the Wisconsin Legislature for resolving the issues surrounding the mascot issue, and believe that the issue is resolved and respectful to our cultural principles. I am also going to re-send a thank you in regard to an even older issue that's been resolved. I refer to Act 31 that sets minimum standards for the introduction of Native American awareness and issues in the educational realm. We have benefitted from these small standards in that they cut to notions of tolerance and increased awareness of the uniqueness of sovereign tribal nations. To bring these issues back in today's challenging political climate would be a waste of valuable time and financial resources. Time and resources that could be better used to find solutions for improving economic conditions throughout Wisconsin communities.

Tribal legislators face many of the same challenges as you. We seek efficiency in government, local control, and greater opportunities for our people and our children. Tribes deal with local problems in their communities such as health care costs and disparities, alcohol, drug traffic, public safety, crime, land use, and other community needs. In the past years the tribes and the State have made great strides in cooperation. Yet there is much more work to be done. Our annual meeting here in Madison on March 7 with the State agency secretaries and the legislative leadership brought direct, frank and

productive dialogue. We value today's opportunity equally to speak as legislators to legislators. This is not a time for retreat or for undoing what has been done for Wisconsin tourism, job training, health care, school environments, conservation, or cooperative law enforcement. This is a time for seeking better ways and for moving forward.

In closing I would like to say a few words in my language, with the translation. The words are meant in the spirit of mutual respect and partnership. In other words, in the spirit of our government-to-government relationship.

Ganawendam gaye o' o gida'akiim, ninga'anaan
Gakina gegoo wendanamangeyaan
Ganawenim bemisejig, miinawa awesiinyag

Nibiikaang eyaajig, mitaakimig bemode'ijig

Waabanong, Zhaawanoong
Ningabii'anong, miinawa Giiwedionong
Wiidokaawishinamm weweni izhi'genawaabamangwaa

Take care of the Earth, our Mother
and all the things we get from her.
Take care of those who fly, and the
animals
those in the water, and the crawlers
on Earth
East, South
West, and North
Help us to take care of them

The tribes are hopeful we can find a balance between bringing an end to this recession while still exemplifying the environmental stewardship that is intertwined in our history. From Chief Buffalo and our ancestors who signed our Treaties to John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Gaylord Nelson, there has been a vision of preserving a wonderful way of life. That way of life and ultimately that quality of life is inherent in the natural resources and clean waters of our tribal and state lands. If at the end of the day, if all else failed, and preservation of what all of us share is what is passed on to future generations, I think that will be an incredible accomplishment in its own right.

In closing on behalf of the sovereign nations that are here today, I want to say megwitch (Thank you) for listening to our words. (End)