

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

Chairman's Report for: July 2008 through June 2009

Leech Lake Reservation

Good morning and welcome to the July quarterly meeting of the Leech Lake Reservation Business Committee. Rather than just give you a report covering this past quarter, I would like to take this time to talk with you about the direction this administration has set during my first year as Chairman.

Many of you are familiar with the rocky road I have traveled in order to become elected as your Chairman. The journey was worth it because you expressed your confidence in me by rewarding me with a landslide victory of 56% in the primary election. This was clearly a mandate to implement the changes we had talked about in many of your homes.

During this first year we were able to accomplish some of the ideas that were fundamental to my earlier campaigns. One was the Day Labor program and sharing the tax rebate with the band membership. We can be proud of both of these accomplishments.

However, we could not implement any of the needed changes without first having a majority support of the Reservation Business Committee. From the beginning of my administration I made it clear that I would not condone anything other than open and honest government. This meant creating an atmosphere where the elected officials would work together for the good of our people, rather than play politics with our limited resources. With that in mind, I outright supported the election of Eugene "Ribs" Whitebird and Michael J. Bongo.

Also during the start of my term as Chairman, there were administrative level staff changes that needed to be made. These changes were made in order to ensure that my administration was staffed with people that would work hard at taking our people in a new direction and not trying to undermine the mandate the people had supported in voting for me.

This administration started with the understanding that the standard or old "business as usual," way of running tribal government does not work. It is not an efficient system and does not build an economy. The majority of reservations that run IRA Governments have high unemployment and poverty rates.

There is not enough resources to meet the needs. So we have become dependent on Gaming to generate the revenues to operate our tribal services. At the same time the State of Minnesota continues to try to open up gaming. This last legislative session they were just three votes short from opening up gaming. Think of that, “Three votes” that was how close they came.

That effort will not stop. All the more reason we need to understand that we can no longer do business as usual. Not in how we do tribal government. Not in how we fund tribal services. We need to build a stable government, a working economy, and move away from our dependence on gaming.

At the beginning of this administration I attended, along with District 3 Rep Ribs Whitebird and some staff, a Nation Building Conference to more fully understand how to move us in a new direction.

What I believe what I learned has great possibility for us. We worked to host this week that same Nation Building Conference here on Leech Lake. We had great attendance by the other MCT Reservations and Red Lake.

At this conference we talked with many of our neighboring reservations about the costs and the benefits from taking this different approach to government. It will require a real commitment as we change how tribal government operates for the well being of our people.

In preparation we spent this last year doing a lot of the strategic planning. We have completed or are in the process of completing the following;

- a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy or CEDS plan,
- a Workforce Development Plan,
- a Disaster Response Plan with FEMA,
- a Communication Plan,
- an Integrated Technology Plan for the band that includes the government, gaming, tribal college, and Bugonaygeshig school.

We have revamped the Twin Cities Office. We are hiring more advocates and assembling a resource guide to help identify more services, partnerships and outside resources in the metro area to meet the needs of our people.

We have started the Elders Department while it is still in the growing stage it should shortly start meeting the needs of elders including indentifying and connecting them to the additional resources and services that they are eligible for. The Elder Department also has advocates that are part of the Twin Cities office. We will be having an Elders fine dining dinner with entertainment this August at Northern Lights.

This administration is committed to making sure services and opportunity are in place for our youth. We have a number of education, employment and workforce training programs in place and committed an addition \$150 thousand dollars to make sure there were increased youth summer employment opportunities.

In regard to that commitment to our youth Leech Lake started the planning for a Regional Youth Services Providers Summit that we will host this October. This summit will bring together area agencies and programs that serve youth to put together a Regional Youth Development Strategy.

These Youth Service Providers will help develop collaborations and partnerships for guiding and saving young lives. This effort is also part of our developing a reservation Youth Development Plan specifically for our youth.

All of these efforts are part of the change needed if we are to move away from business as usual and toward real nation building. Changes we need not just to survive but to prosper. By doing this I believe that I am fulfilling to you, the Leech Lake people, my promise to not only bring change, but to bring positive change that will guarantee a good future for our children, grandchildren, and our future generations.

The start of this new fiscal year and the second year of this administration is also the start of implementing the changes. I look forward to a new year with lots of accomplishments.

Before I close, I would like to mention a few of the other accomplishments of this administration:

- Again we have established an Elders Department and funded it through our own resources.
- So far, we have done well in weathering the economic collapse that surrounds us. Our unemployment rate has stayed steady at around 40%, while the U.S. rate has risen from just above 4% to over 10%. When they get to 40%, maybe they'll know how we feel.
- Our reservation has stood strong at the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe level and has continued to refuse accepting less than our fair and equitable share of the Nelson Act settlement. We also seek assurances that this will not negatively affect our claims on existing and future clouded title cases.

- We continue to support constitutional reform, especially concerning a separation of powers, equal representation, blood quantum and membership.
- We have adopted a Taxation Code and a tribal Tobacco Tax. This is an act of sovereignty that makes it possible to offer lower cost native products at our retail outlets thereby keeping money in our member's pockets, increasing net profits to the Band and providing a tax revenue stream that does not pay taxes to the state.
- The Shakopee Mdewakanton's have graciously granted us \$2 million for two separate projects. One million is for the development of fifteen new housing units to help address our housing needs. The other million is to finish development of the Shingobee project, which we all know has become an embarrassment to our reservation because it makes us look bad.
- All our High School graduates were honored by the council with an appreciation dinner, award certificate and a \$100 dollars. Our graduates were very appreciative of the recognition.

There are a lot more we could talk about for example our new radio station, the solar panel manufacturing plant, the efforts for a new high school building for the Bug School, our lobbying at the state and federal level, the Stimulus funding efforts. There are a lot of positive things but there are also some serious issues or violations that need to be addressed and they will be in the near future. But for today I wanted to keep this report positive and short.

So, in closing I would like to thank the RBC for supporting many of the efforts we have made. I remind you though that we cannot afford to go on with business as usual. We cannot play politics with our limited resources when making decisions that affect the well-being and destiny of our people.

I give thanks to the most important supporters of all, the members of this reservation. So on behalf of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and the RBC. Chi Migwetch Anishinabeg!