

**Report to the people of the Leech Lake Reservation**  
**From Secretary Treasurer Michael J. Bongo**  
July 2010

Dear Fellow Band Members:

I wish to start my report by first and foremost thanking everyone for their past support and for getting out, voting and participating in the recent tribal election. It is only through your participation that tribal government may move forward and progress by electing skilled, competent and educated officials. That said, I wish say “thank you” again.

Let me begin with some of the things that we need to achieve in order to bring prosperity back to the Leech Lake Reservation and the people of Leech Lake. This past week the majority of the Tribal Council spent the week in Washington DC meeting with members of the Minnesota Congressional Delegation. Our reason for undertaking this initiative was to attempt to address some of the tribe’s huge infrastructural needs, and they are many. We are in dire need of a new Bug -O-Nay- Gee-Shig High School and we continue to run into opposition from, of course, the BIA. I can only characterize the BIA as a bad example to all Indian tribes. Further, I guess the BIA doesn’t believe in providing Indian children with a quality education and a conducive learning environment.

Fortunately we have some very fine representatives in Washington DC helping us to fight the good fight and I want to take a moment and give my personal thanks to our good friends such as Senator Al Frankin, who continues to take the BIA to task. Senator Frankin is a good man that every Indian in the country should fully support for his efforts to bring accountability to the BIA. I also want to thank Congresswomen Betty McCullum, another real champion. And, of course the champion of all champions Congressmen Jim Obestar, our senior member of Congress. I also wish to thank Senator Amy Klobachier, Congressmen Tim Waltz and Congressmen John Kline for their support and help.

In addition to the Bug-O-Nay-Ge-Shig School we are also lobbying Congress for a new hospital. The Cass Lake Indian Hospital has been written into the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act as a demonstration project. The Indian Healthcare Act, I am pleased to report, has been passed so we are half way there. Now we need to fight with Indian Health Service to ensure the money is appropriated in their budget. My intent is to testify before the House Appropriation Committee in an effort to ensure the money does in fact get appropriated. I will keep you informed as to our progress.

Two other key priorities that we also continue working on is a new government center and an elderly assisted living facility which hopefully can be accomplished in conjunction with a new hospital.

As you can clearly see we have set a pretty ambitious federal legislative agenda but I wish to remind folks that the goals we have established are very achievable but it will take hard work, effort and team work to be successful. It has been a long, long time since any Tribal Council has focused on the infrastructural needs of the Leech Lake Reservation. One only has to look at our

current decaying facilities to see just how great the needs truly are and it is time to address these needs and we need to look at these initiatives as an investment in the future of the Leech Lake Reservation.

An additional goal established by the new council includes improving the workplace environment. The Budget Team has mandated that each program be given the opportunity to establish an employee incentive program. This would entail improving customer service and all employees will be required to participate in customer service training and team building exercises. The goal is to improve employee attendance, performance, productivity and accountability. If we can get our staff to work together and work smarter and make work fun and exciting I believe we can eliminate a significant amount of waste and mismanagement and in the process save the Leech Lake Reservation millions of dollars.

We will also be scheduling regular government-wide staff meetings in an effort to improve communications. In order to be successful communications is vitally important given the size of our organization. All of our employees need to be on the same page, moving in the same direction at the same time. On a cost saving measure we will be requiring all of our programs to use the fleet vehicles as opposed to paying employee mileage for use of their private vehicles. The only time employee mileage would be paid for private automobile use is if there are no fleet vehicles available. Presently we are paying to have fleet vehicles sit idle. This move could save the Leech Lake Reservation over \$500,000 a year.

I would also like to provide a brief update regarding the Shingobee project, as I have had a number of Band members ask me about it. Unfortunately, this project was completely out of control. It was a runaway project that was possibly headed for disaster. Policies and procedures were not followed; there was no business plan, marketing plan, nor was there a construction plan. We spent over \$60,000.00 on architectural fees yet there are no architectural plans that have been presented to the Council. There are several other variables that were not addressed such as parking, well and septic issues, and general construction concerns. In the big picture the Band was looking at having to invest 2-3 million dollars into a bar and restaurant which if was successful, would have taken up to 25-30 years to recoup our investment if everything ran smoothly. Ultimately, as I characterized earlier this was a project that was headed down the wrong road and was heading for disaster, and the Council took the necessary steps to shut the spending down until there is a solid plan in place. We will be reevaluating the entire Shingobee property for future use, based upon other priorities chosen by the Council. I believe it is in Leech Lake's best interest to put this project on hold until we have a solid business plan and concept that will ensure long term success, profitability and sustainability. Whatever plans we develop for Shingobee must ensure this will not be a financial drain on the Reservation.

As I have previously reported, June 30<sup>th</sup> is the close of our fiscal year. We have thirty days to close out our fiscal records. Next month I will provide an updated financial report regarding the Bands financial status. Again, thank you to everyone who participated in the recent elections, and thank you for your time, support and patients.