

**State of the Tribes Address  
to the  
Wisconsin State Assembly  
Madison, Wisconsin  
March 7, 2006**

Good morning. Speaker Gard, Members of the Wisconsin Assembly, Wisconsin Senators, Governor Doyle, Constitutional Officers of Wisconsin, Cabinet Secretaries, Chief Justice and Justices of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, and guests. Greetings, and indeed - greetings from all the Tribal leaders throughout Wisconsin.

To begin with, we would like to recognize the elders of all nations. Elders are the very reason we are here - they have guided us through life, helped us shape the present day economic, social, and political environment, and have given us a vision of the future – a vision of a better world for all people. Elders taught us about our cultural roots -- roots that are firmly embedded in tradition; roots that do not serve to bind us, but to nurture us.

Would all elders please stand so that we may recognize you?

Our veterans too have special standing in our communities. They have always led the way, ensuring that the path was clear and safe. Native American men and women have served as commissioned officers and as enlisted personnel in defense of the United States in every war from the Revolutionary War to the present day war that we are engaged in. Even before they were United States Citizens, Native Americans fought to defend this country and its values.

Finally, the Drum and our songs, as we witnessed this morning, carry messages that render honor for civil, social, and mourning ceremonies.

Our thanks to Speaker Gard and to the Wisconsin Assembly for this opportunity to deliver this address you. This is the second occasion, and one that we hope will continue into the

future, that we as tribal nations have been able to deliver this address in a government-to-government forum.

It gives me great pleasure at this time to acknowledge the Wisconsin Tribes and tribal leaders in attendance today. Please stand when I call your name.

Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Chairman Eugene Bigboy and Delegation

Forest County Potawatomi  
Vice President Al Milham and Delegation

Ho-Chunk Nation  
President George R. Lewis and Delegation

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

Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
President Victoria A. Doud and Delegation

Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin  
Chairwoman Karen Washinawatok and Delegation

Oneida Indian Nation of Wisconsin  
Vice Chairwoman Kathy Hughes and Delegation

Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Vice Chairman Mark Montano and Delegation

St. Croix Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Vice Chairman Lewis Taylor and Delegation

Sokaogon Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Chairwoman Sandra Rachal and Delegation

Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians  
President Robert Chicks and Delegation

It is an honor to address the Assembly on this special occasion. As Tribal Chairpersons, Tribal Presidents, Council Members, and Tribal Legislators, our duties and responsibilities encompass the broad range of political, social, and economic spectrums. One of

the increasingly important aspects of these responsibilities is the interaction that we are obligated to develop and maintain with the elected leaders of Wisconsin. In that regard, we believe that today is a day for celebrating what has been accomplished along those lines; for recognizing progress toward common goals; and for highlighting some important issues that we believe will bring us closer to our collective goals.

In the year since we first addressed this Assembly, our country has been severely challenged, both by man and by Nature. I am proud to say that people from our eleven Indian tribes in Wisconsin joined people of Wisconsin's cities, towns, and villages, responding swiftly, courageously, and generously -- giving what they had, to help our relatives during their adversity. Tribal nations in Wisconsin deployed staff and emergency workers to assist with humanitarian aid in the affected areas. We sent builders and service providers to assist in rescue and recovery efforts. We are very proud and grateful to have been able to contribute to that effort.

Natural disaster has placed new and huge demands on federal resources, and we in Wisconsin are feeling the impact. Federal dollars, already heavily strained by military operations abroad, were re-directed to disaster recovery efforts. Like the state government, tribal governments also experienced the negative impact of federal budget rescissions. Nowhere was this more evident than in our health care systems.

In the face of increasing health care costs, budget rescissions from the Indian Health Services continue to limit progress. In the past six months since Hurricane Katrina, tribes have experienced two rescissions of health care contracts, with more expected, and in the past four years, rescissions have equaled projected total increases. The same is true in the President's 2007 budget. Our calculations suggest that inflated expenses and population increases will surpass the anticipated gains in funding. In the meantime, the Indian Health Care Improvement

Act, which expired in FY 2000, and which would include changes beneficial to tribal health systems, continues to languish without re-authorization. The combined effect of these trends has created an enormous disparity in funding. In the Midwestern states, including Wisconsin, approximately 38% of the need on our reservations is being funded, compared to a national average close to 60% in other regions. Wisconsin is not receiving its fair share. We ask the Wisconsin leadership to help us carry the message to Congress to reauthorize and adequately fund the Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

As tribal communities, we have grappled with problems of chronic disease for many years. Vascular disease, metabolic disease, alcohol and drug use continue at near-epidemic levels across Indian Country. Our diabetes mortality rate is 181% higher than for all other races in Wisconsin, and infant mortality is 47% greater. Treatments for these systemic problems are being developed at a great pace. Treatment costs, however, continue to rise – rising as reimbursements diminish, administrative funds disappear, and federal funds promised in annual contracts are rescinded.

What can we do about this? Well, tribes are not allowed to purchase these services at rates for which we believe tribes should be eligible. The Medicare Modernization Act could allow tribes to purchase such care at a discounted rate, similar to that of the VA and Department of Defense. This Act too is approaching two years of delay in implementation. Such delay limits tribal members' access to health care, and results in increasing burdens to the state and federal systems.

Finally the President's 2007 budget proposes the elimination of the entire Indian Health Service's Urban Indian Health Program. This program was created to address the enormous health needs of American Indians who had been relocated from reservations under federal authority during the 1950s through the 1970s.

Why should these health care initiatives – the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, the Medicare Modernization Act, and the Urban Indian Health Program – be passed? First, there is a federal trust responsibility through treaty obligations and federal statutes to provide health care to American Indians on and off reservations. Second, the health care disparities are plain and clear. It is important to understand the great differences in the level of services that are currently being provided, even among the Tribes in Wisconsin. And finally, if these measures are not passed, other health care agencies at state and local levels will become over-burdened. We urge the State to partner with the Wisconsin tribes to make our voices heard in Washington for the benefit of all. We urge the Wisconsin Legislature to pass a resolution memorializing Congress to preserve the Urban Indian Health Program and to increase its funding for Indian Health programs.

The words “Homeland Security” ring loud and clear in the world in which we now live. Similar to the findings of local and state governments following 9/11, tribal governments too found themselves lacking in the area of emergency preparedness. We recognize that man-made or natural disasters do not necessarily take into consideration political or jurisdictional boundaries. Fire, floods, disease, weather, hazardous materials, and acts of terrorism, are all things that governmental leaders must consider. Federal funds to implement safety strategies have diminished drastically over the past year, and future federal funds are expected to be directed elsewhere, according to a risk analysis formula.

The issue of emergency preparedness and management is one of paramount importance. Indian nations call upon the state and its local governments to work cooperatively with Indian nations to ensure optimum efficiency in planning and executing emergency protocols and service. Recognizing that what works in one region may not work in another, we acknowledge that combined services expand our individual readiness.

Law enforcement is a similar concern. Like most rural governments, we are faced with limited financial resources and increasing costs of law enforcement and enforcement support services. Several Tribes today provide emergency services such as fire, first responder, and ambulance services to the towns and villages, both on and off the reservations. We wrestle with the meth labs, illegal drug traffic and addiction, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, traffic and conservation offenses, petty and violent crime, often without the means to achieve peace, secure convictions, or provide treatment or counseling. Again, we believe that looking for cooperative ways to address this enforcement problem will result in safer communities, and we ask the state and local governments to join us in seeking solutions. In particular, we ask for Assembly passage of Senate Bill 297 relating to the powers of tribal law enforcement officers, and Senate Bill 299 relating to the powers of tribal conservation wardens, both of which have passed the State Senate.

Economic stability is paramount to success of any community. Like our neighbors, tribal governments are concerned with the economic life and the viability of our communities. What incentives can we offer our children to remain within, and assist with the development of their communities? Some Tribes, due to geographic locations of their gaming facilities, have become the largest employers in several counties. Most, however, must rely on a seasonal customer base. We recognize the need for economic diversification and community development. Far more than other communities, reservation communities experience an enormous outflow of dollars. Operating budgets and payrolls flow almost instantly to adjoining, non-reservation communities for goods and services. While this syndrome may seem okay for some on its surface, that vision is shortsighted. In fact, enhanced economic development on reservations would strengthen the economy both on and off the reservations, by circulating revenue longer and by doing so, raising the amount of revenue in circulation. To a certain

extent, Indian gaming has played an important role in boosting economic development in and around reservations, as was intended. In Wisconsin, Indian gaming means jobs, it means expanded businesses, and it means new business, both on and off the reservations. We have invited businesses, business partners, and vendors, both Indian and non-Indian, to join us today in the gallery. Would you please stand so that we can recognize your presence? We believe that there are significant economic opportunities that remain untapped.

Economic development does not stop at the reservation boundaries from either direction – it has a regional impact and should be addressed as a regional priority. I encourage us all, -- state, local, and tribal leaders alike -- to seek new concepts of cooperation and collaboration for the economic improvement of our communities.

Education, and housing are also among the top priorities in our communities. While it is true that in some instances, tribes have been able to augment their housing and education programs with gaming dollars, we must inform you that even in the best of these circumstances, there still remain far too many unmet and essential needs. It must be pointed out that a significant number of tribal gaming operations are generating revenue levels at an amount only sufficient enough to sustain operations. Yet all our reservations are faced with needs that far exceed our education and housing program capacities. Again, like other issues raised, these problems do not stop at the reservation boundary. They impact everyone, and deserve scrutiny and solutions to meet critical and essential needs. We urge the Legislature to pass Assembly Bill 631 to allow tribes the option of creating charter schools, an innovative measure that has seen success across the country.

Veterans have a special place in Indian Country, as well as in the hearts of all citizens. In a small measure, we expressed our gratitude to these brave men and women by the passage of the Wisconsin GI Bill last session. We now urge support and passage of Senate Bill 613, co-

sponsored by Representatives Gard, Loeffelholz, Turner, and Musser, expanding benefits to be extended to all of Wisconsin's veterans. This bill has already been passed in the Senate and we look forward to similar support in the Assembly.

Speaker Gard, as long as I have your attention, let me take this opportunity to urge you to bring Assembly Joint Resolution 17, recognizing the sovereign status of the Tribes, to the floor for action. A similar resolution was passed by the Senate in the last session, but has since expired. The adoption of this resolution would perhaps be the single most significant action the Assembly can accomplish here and now, while the Tribes are here in Madison, to further the government-to-government relationship with the Tribes. Adoption of this resolution will raise the awareness at all levels that Tribes are governments. We are not creations of the State, like counties or municipalities, and we are not creations of the federal government. Tribes are nations of their own creation, with a long history and tradition of self-government. The Tribes are domestic, independent political entities, entitled to federal protection and service by reason of their domestic sovereign status.

Today is an important event in the continuing process of government-to-government communications. As the year progresses and we enter the election season, let us commit ourselves as leaders and legislators to a continued process of open, honest and respectful debate as we move forward in service to all our constituents.

Finally, in what we think is the most important message of this address, let me raise the Tribes' interest in the environment. All of us in Wisconsin are proud of the abundance of natural resources. Our lakes and rivers are in danger and in need of restoration. Our forests and fields support and give life, but their abundance is threatened by mismanagement. Our air is relatively free of pollutants, but for how long? The ways and traditions of the Tribes have been - and still are -- to live in harmony with the land; to take no more than is necessary, and to give



thanks to the Creator for what we receive. With deference to minor differences in tradition, I believe that this respect for the land is almost universal across this State.

Recent dissent has arisen over Tribal overtures to assert their inherent governmental authority to protect surface water, ground water, air, and drinking water sources within their reservation boundaries. Like so many other things, these interests transcend reservation boundaries. The goal that we must all strive toward is protection of Mother Earth, whom we do not own, but rather hold in trust for our children unto the Seventh Generation. As governmental leaders, we need to come to a common understanding about what we value, and we urge a common and deeper understanding, greater cooperation and mutual assistance with the Tribes in the recognition and stewardship of our common resources.

We are mindful of the work of the Joint Legislative Council's Special Committee on State-Tribal Relations, and of the good that has been done in this State through legislation. In the past legislative session, the Special Committee has drafted and introduced 14 bills, and we commend the leadership of Representative Terry Musser in this work.

We have engaged in consultation sessions as the Governor's initiative toward State-Tribal consultation is implemented by the executive agencies.

We applaud the joint activities of the Wisconsin Supreme Court, Circuit Courts, and tribal courts toward resolving difficult questions of jurisdiction and conflict of laws between tribal and State courts.

We recognize that we, as elected tribal leaders, share goals and concerns with you in the Assembly and Senate, and we look forward to the opportunity to discuss, design, debate, and strategize our mutual interests with you on a government-to-government basis. Local control and self-determination are the goals of each and every tribe, but we know that we cannot achieve this without counting adjoining communities into the citizen-to-government equation. Today is

not our only opportunity, and we will continue to meet and communicate with you as leader-to-leader and as legislator-to-legislator. Our challenges are great, and with an abiding faith in the good will of our respective nations, we can and will make a better life for all the people of Wisconsin.

Thank you.