

Attach to 5/18/14 Minutes  
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Our tribal reaffirmation was based on our Language and Culture and History. Since 1994 our people have become severely assimilated to the non-native values and ethics as evidence as I bring my issues to you in writing. Coming forward to you in this manner is colliding with my teachings as an Anishinawbe kweh. My words may come across as harsh, and I respectfully remind you that Native women have earned the title of being known as the backbone of the Nation. My hope is to be effective and I ask for your patience and understanding as I bring forward some difficult issues for our tribe as well as some personal struggles I face every day. I am asking that you listen carefully so may be able to identify some positive steps into a stronger traditional cultural future. Submitting this presentation for the official record may be the only way my descendants and yours will understand what condition the tribe they inherited has become and why. I believe our tribe is in peril because our cultural identity is becoming endangered.

There are many reasons for this assimilation, and I believe most of you are aware of that. I am not here to speak in depth about that history. At the same time I believe that our history holds the answers for the decisions that must be made for tomorrow. The fact that we have embraced a governmental system that is modeled from our oppressors is part of the problem. I see little room for our beautiful traditional culture with this type of system. And I am sure the ancestors of the oppressors' are dancing with joy in their afterlife. This is our current reality as the system we have to work with and we need to come together as a people to find solutions. Our oppressors first used the churches for assimilation and now they are using the introduced government system we have chosen to adopt from them. Their work of assimilation is now being done by ourselves. We continue to adopt their values as our role models and this causes the cycle of oppression that we perpetuate. We can see this value manifest from too many of our citizens huge sense of entitlement, holding their hand out to "get" something and sometimes anything for themselves. This is basically how I see the problem.

Currently I understand all departments are going through budget cuts. Money was never intended to define us as a tribe, but rather our people do. These budget cuts have become necessary to maintain our government, and I understand the bottom line type of thinking. If all our people are assimilated, then what will define our community as distinctively Anishinawbek? I believe we have blood memory that stirs our spirit when needed, which cannot be measured by dollars because our ancestors are far too valuable.

Many of you who are on council now were present when the current Chairman pledged at the "meet the candidates" event, that he would construct a "traditional culture advisory team" I believe that's what it was called. I thought that sounded awesome to me...and I have hopes that some measurable action steps may be started soon or have been started. Looking back 20 years ago, I understand why our tribal programs did not have this type of necessity at the time

of reaffirmation. But since that time, we have now evolved into that need, and perhaps on the brink of crisis. I dare say we need to move forward with purpose because of the current struggles of our culture bearers.

Culture bearers are those whose sacrifices are great, and I identify myself as such. Also I believe my rewards for such forfeiture are also great. The value of such knowledge was once sought and revered as priceless. Seldom are my services as a natural fiber artist needed with our contemporary lifestyles. The problem is that many old time values and traditional teachings are held there within the process of creating. Our assimilated citizens are unaware of the value, because I believe they have become so culturally bankrupt they lack the knowledge to understand what to seek or how to ask. If we continue this deficit of traditional culture we also lose the reason the tribe created the programs and departments. Our tribal government has an opportunity to become the leaders in the eyes of our ancestors when they embrace our language, culture and history, and therefore modeling for our citizens the very standards that brought our reaffirmation. Money was never intended to be our guiding principles as a tribe.

Money is needed of course, but should not be at the cost of the culture bearers. Please allow me to explain through my personal short story. I live in tribal housing because I lost two homes in as many years when the bottom fell from the housing market a few years ago. I am so grateful that my tribe was able to scooch over to make a little room for one more person to come home. My rent is adjusted according to my income. Because of my own traditional values and ethics I am inclined to "donate" when at all possible to give back to the community and therefore the tribe. My father taught me how to express this by saying this is cutting off one end the blanket and sewing it on the other end. This type of bartering might be by providing various teaching techniques or giving an actual item like a basket for a tribal department raffle. This is my generosity, and I need to be the one to decide when it is possible to give. I have sacrificed earnings from a "regular job" and spent my life seeking a cultural education that cannot be bought at any university anywhere in the world. The teachings or items that have taken a lifetime of learning become diminished over time through the expectations of the requester. So now let me be clear, when a tribal program asks for a donation because of budget cuts, it also takes from me the opportunity to be generous. When the request is made with no tradition of passing a gift (known as asking in a good way) or through an empty ceremony for the cultural item or teaching, all my sacrifices are minimized. Not only am I robbed of the opportunity to be generous, I am then obliged to assist as my cultural teachings bear witness. If my people need me or my services are requested, which I remember is rare, I need and want to provide what I have been blessed to learn. Recently I am feeling exploited by my own tribe. The reality is I am already "donating" my life towards learning our beautiful traditional culture. Our tribe is rich with wisdom held by culture bearers of many sorts and of course there are variances in the spectrum of each individual. Culture

bearers could be defined within a wide range; from the treaty tribal fishermen and hunters to fire keepers, drummers and singers, language learners, community pipe carriers, story tellers and artisans of many mediums, to name a few. We all have a tight rope to balance our contemporary life with our traditional life. Some spend a weekend or two a month some spend countless hours each day being as traditional as their life choices allow. Others have spent a lifetime to learn from our ancestors footsteps.

What value can be placed on these people who are keepers of our culture? Now I need to speak about profit. I believe our tribal accounting department is one way to keep track, but I need to explain how many other ways can our tribes profit can be measured. Our tribes profit also needs to be measured by the services provided to our people, and not only on an accountants data spread sheet. You as policy makers must always remember what got us here, language, culture and history. While we have the capacity to provide a wide range of services for our citizens, what good are all these tribal departments if we are to become assimilated? Because I am a solution based person I have been searching for answers. It's easier to define the problem rather than the solution, but one thing is certain, our cultural identity within the tribe is in danger. I believe we can't afford this kind of profit loss, because our tribe will not endure.

I must explain now that my battles and struggles are great because of my life choice to become a culture bearer. I am also called an artist, and I have been recognized by the State of Michigan when I received a "Michigan Heritage Award" in 2010. Because of the budget cuts and even before, I am frequently not recognized as valuable within my own tribal government. There are many others who are extremely wealthy with knowledge of our ancestors. I am not a business woman, or grant writer, accountant, publicity specialist or desk clerk, but I perform all these duties as I try to balance on that tight rope I spoke of earlier. For example; I turned off my land line and purchased a cell phone and wifi internet to be effective with my position on the NRC. The pursuit to get a tribal cell took over four months...so then I gave up. My bill almost exceeds my stipend, and currently has been shut off for non-payment. And my tribe needs a donation from me? When I give that donation for a tribal department gift, the department appears generous, and I feel pride for my tribe through the eyes of the receiver, but the reality is I am exploited because I am the one being generous and not compensated and sometimes not even appreciated. I struggle with these dilemmas and more on a daily basis, I've become almost immune to the disrespect that I have come to expect. If a cultural advisory team was set up....perhaps my issues would be addressed through to you who are policy makers. The following is what I would ask as direct action steps to move our culture bearers forward towards respect.

I would ask the cultural advisory team to create a Cultural Sensitivity Training first for you here as council with executive and judicial, then the department managers, followed by the employees, then all the new hires. I would ask the cultural advisory team to then bring forward the need to create a process for the tribe to purchase the gifts or raffle items from our tribal artisans. Then the tribal department or elected officials could submit from their budget to truly give an honorable gift when needed. I would ask the cultural advisory team to identify symptoms of assimilation and make appropriate recommendations to resolve whenever appropriate. I would ask the cultural advisory team to ensure our culture bearers are included in a significant way while welcoming guests or at gatherings through Pipe or Water ceremony, drum, smudge, prayer, song, or staff. I would ask the cultural advisory team to listen to the concerns of our Tribal employee challenges as they are embracing their own tight rope dilemmas between contemporary work and traditional life choices. Then the team could bring forward legitimate concerns to have them addressed appropriately. I would ask the cultural advisory team to address how to build business support for those citizens who have chosen to live from their knowledge, talent, or art. Perhaps more citizens would have the desire to pursue their traditional culture once they find themselves better equipped to start the tight rope walk. I would ask the cultural advisory team to be available for those departments that have a deficit in fundamentals of our reaffirmation and advise what action steps can be taken to rectify those concerns. Our tribe would benefit in ways we can only imagine. These are just a few ideas of how the issues I have brought forward could be addressed. The extent of our tribal traditional wealth would be endless as we grow together with the seven grandfathers of bravery, love, wisdom, truth, honesty, respect and humility.

Which part of our three separate government entities needs to create the cultural advisory team? In my opinion all three branches, this is the one opportunity that would fully support the traditional standards of our reaffirmation of language, culture, and history, working together as our ancestors intended for the good of our people. Without some kind of action steps we are destined to continue on the same destructive course, which will lead to tribal dissolution. Some of you may believe I am being overly dramatic. That would depend on what area of an imagined cultural attachment scale you decide would be satisfactory. On a linear scale -0 would be totally assimilated and let's say +100 would be highest point possible when balancing on that tight rope. Reflect for a moment on the wisdom points between, and now come to realize how much wealth we have already lost with each passing season claiming another citizen through death or our culture bearers giving up the struggle for the community to focus only within a smaller circle of family.

You have been granted an honorable title through the majority vote to make the best choices available for seven generations. This traditional teaching can be identified to include the generation of the past aways and also the generation of the babies yet to be born, and finally

for those who voted for you in this current generation. I would like to remind you at this time, that during your campaign when you were seeking citizen votes, many of you pledged to support language and culture. Now is the time for you to answer that pledge to the people who hold the sovereign title of cultural bearer, whose title is earned not through votes but through living the seven grandfathers teaching. You are my voice and implore you to vigorously advocate for me. I bring to you an opportunity to be idle no more.

Protect and embrace our culture bearers for the future of the tribe, just as vigorously as tribal budgets are scrutinized. Our tribal citizens are frustrated and sometimes that causes us to turn on each other like hungry caged animals. I believe it is hunger pains for our traditions that are the cause of much of the citizens' lack of contentment and many times manifest through attitudes of entitlement. Most disagreements are caused by different perceptions that created different realities. Our community minded people and culture bearers are becoming older and passing through the western door, while our more assimilated citizens yearn for things of our oppressors, therefore perpetuating the destructive cycle of assimilation. I am baffled when I hear whispers of "want" for more per capita payment from the tribe that was recognized because of our language, culture, and history. That kind individualism is selfish and does not support our reaffirmation standards. This is the evidence of how some citizens in our tribal community understand value and profit.

I believe with all my heart our ancestors intentions were for us to live our life as they had embracing their values and beliefs. I also believe that we are only here today because of the prayers of those whose names we longer know. Not all of our citizens have had opportunity to learn as I have, and not all our citizens understand the responsibilities you have. Please come to realize that we are in the twelfth hour and this presentation is the two minute warning .....culture bearers are becoming extinct, so ask yourself and your tribal departments what can be done to support them and what can be done to embrace them, and finally what can you do to respect us. When the leaders of the future no longer know your name, what will they learn from our tribal footsteps that have been created today? So for now as with most days I will continue to pray for strength and unification for those descendants just as hopefully and sincerely as our ancient ancestors prayed for us.

*David  
Holland*  
5-18-14