

State of the Nation Address
White Earth Nation of Anishinaabe
Erma J. Vizenor, Chairwoman
March 8, 2012
Shooting Star Event Center
Mahnomen, Minnesota

Min-o-wah-bun (Good morning).

Tribal Council, distinguished guests, employees, and citizens of the Great White Earth Nation, thank you for being here today.

In our tradition we acknowledge and give thanks first to our Creator, Manidoo, God, for this day to gather in unity as Anishinaabe, one people, one nation. We are grateful for the spirit of our ancestors, for our families, the wisdom of our elders, and the richness of our culture, language, and spirituality.

Me-qwitch to Tim St. Clair for our opening prayer and pipe ceremony; to Smoky Hill Drum Group, White Earth Honor Guard, White Earth Royalty--our princesses and braves, and Mike Swan, our Master of Ceremonies.

On behalf of the Tribal Council, I say thank you to our employees who work in our tribal government, gaming, housing, education, and business enterprises. Thank you for your dedication and service. Please stop by the showcases of our programs and departments.

Thank you to Shooting Star Casino, Hotel, and Event Center for hosting the State of the Nation, and to Jerome Lhotka and Michael Neusser, Tribal Economic Development and Marketing, for producing the 2012 State of the Nation Report.

To our guests of honor, welcome. A special thank you to the students from the Pine Point School for singing our national anthem and to the choir from Mahnomen High School for singing during our open house this morning. For my love of students and passion for education, the State of Nation address is dedicated to you. You are the future of White Earth Nation.

Thank you, Brian Brunelle and Dave Warren, on behalf of Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, for presenting the beautiful blanket to White Earth Nation. We will proudly hang it in our tribal headquarters.

To our chiefs who serve on the Tribal Council: Secretary/Treasurer Robert Durant, District I Representative Rene Auginaush, District II Representative Terry Tibbetts, and District III Representative Gus Bevins, thank you for your service, commitment, and hard work. We are a great team. I am proud to serve with you.

It is my honor as your leader to present the state of the White Earth Nation, to give a report of the general condition of our Tribe, to highlight the past year's accomplishments, and to share the vision for the future.

Today I report the state of the White Earth Nation is good and strong, and getting better and stronger every year. While this Country has been in major recession for the past five years with high unemployment, home foreclosures, bailouts for the auto industry and Wall Street and budget cuts that effect federal, state, and tribes, including funding cuts at White Earth, nevertheless, our Tribe has come through remarkably well, particularly in strengthening and expanding tribal infrastructure, services, and programs which means jobs and money for our people.

I am proud to say White Earth has the great reputation as one of the most progressive tribes in the country. Thank you to our administrators, directors, and employees who share the vision and work hard for the betterment of our Nation. We are successful because of your dedication and commitment.

We have an excellent summary of expenditures, budget, accomplishments, and initiatives underway that has been compiled by Jerome Lhotka and Michael Neusser. There are so many it would take hours to share everything but I want to comment on as many as I can.

Public Safety and Tribal Law Enforcement

One of the most basic human needs we have is to feel safe and secure, in our homes, schools, at work, in public places, and our communities. The White Earth Department of Public Safety, under the direction of Chief Randy Goodwin, provides that safety and security on the White Earth Reservation. This department, established in 1996, with one police chief/officer, Mike Robinson, has grown and developed into the best trained, best equipped force of police officers and investigators in the State.

When the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) was passed by Congress and signed by President Obama in August 2010, the Tribal Council and White Earth Public Safety Department were ready to apply and initiate the goals of the Act. Today under TLOA, White Earth will be the first Tribe in the Country assume federal concurrent criminal jurisdiction on the Reservation. We believe the best and most efficient use of resources is to re-engage federal law enforcement directly on the Reservation; by further empowering Tribal law enforcement with federal powers; and, at the same time by continuing to use the systems and powers that have been developed with and by the State of Minnesota during the imposition of Public Law 280 jurisdiction.

White Earth Department of Public Safety is one of the first, if not the first, police departments in the Country to contract with a municipality for police services. In April 2011, the City of Mahnommen hired the White Earth Department of Public Safety to provide them with two full time police officers for services and protection.

In prevention, the White Earth Department of Public Safety has implemented a school aged culturally appropriate curriculum, named the *You Are! Project*, which focuses on improving children's cognitive skills and teaches them about topics such bullying, drugs, and peer pressure. The *You Are! Project* has received national recognition from area schools to the United States Department of Justice in prevention and reducing drug abuse on the White Earth Reservation.

Proclamation to Declare Health Emergency on Abuse of Prescription Drugs and other Illegal Drugs

White Earth Tribal Council was the first in the Country to declare a health emergency on the abuse of prescription drugs and other illegal drugs in our Tribal Nation. This Proclamation was delivered to every White Earth tribal entity, schools, state agencies, federal agencies, and the President of United States as priority that required prevention, intervention, and collaboration at all levels. Community meetings were held throughout the Reservation and a Summit of over 300 participants was held in August 2011. Since then, we have worked aggressively to tackle the abuse of prescription drugs and illegal drugs in our Tribe, collaborating with agencies in health, law enforcement, education, child protection and human services at local, state, federal levels.

Prescription drug abuse and illegal drug abuse is an epidemic across the entire Country that will require a national solution. It is not unique to White Earth but White Earth stepped up first and took action. The solutions will require revenue for programs, facilities, and personal in

treatment and aftercare. Change doesn't happen overnight. Change is a process of changing one's lifestyle, of education, partnerships, support, and continuing to focus and act on the problem.

Prior to the Proclamation, White Earth purchased a youth treatment facility, Oshki-Manidoo, located on 40 acres of beautiful prime property within the city limits of Bemidji, offering culturally appropriate chemical abuse treatment to any Native youth, the first such treatment program in the Country.

Senator Al Franken visited Oshki-Manidoo and was impressed with White Earth's initiative on behalf of Native youth. At the time, the youngest youth there was 12 years old. White Earth is making a positive difference in the problems of chemical abuse.

A month or so ago, I listened to the youth in Boys and Girls Clubs give their speeches in competition for the State Youth of the Year. Each youth was interviewed separately before the panel of judges. One of the questions asked of the youth was, "What would you change in your community?" Every one of the youth wanted to get rid of the drugs, the dealers, and the pill heads that are ruining their communities. I have told the youth's plea to clean up their communities from drugs as I lobby for funds and programs in the Legislature and Congress.

We have a lot of work to do, here and throughout the country, and again, White Earth will lead the way to the solutions on the drug epidemic that other tribes, state, and federal government will follow.

Education

I have said this before and will say it again. Education is a high priority in this administration. Every progressive government invests in education. Education and training are the foundation to economic

development. We cannot have a strong economic system without an educated workforce. Education is the essence of one's personal empowerment, a better quality of life, better earning power, and a better life for one's children. A good education is the preparation for a lifetime of choices, not circumstances of poverty that we see too often. The cycle of youth dropping out of high school and growing to adulthood with poor skills for today's job market must be turned around.

Therefore, we invest time and energy at state and federal levels to secure funds for programs, scholarships, and new school facilities.

It has taken 10 years to get the funds to build the new K-12 Circle of Life Academy that soon will have a grand opening. It is a beautiful school. For years and years, our children and youth went to school in a condemned building, small, outside portable classrooms, leaking ceilings, no science labs, inadequate library, inadequate for technology, no athletic facilities. Learning environment is important. The funds designated for the new Circle of Life Academy could not be used for any other purpose, nor should the funds be. Every child, parent, and community should be proud and grateful as I am to have a nice school that is safe and conducive to learning in a state of the art facility.

We invest in early childhood education, Head Start, and Child Care. The first five years of a child's brain development are the most important to later achievement and success in school. White Earth recently was awarded one of the four Race to the Top grants, the only tribe in Minnesota. The State has not given an exact amount of the grant but White Earth will get a substantial portion of the \$40 million federal award to Minnesota. We thank our Education Department, especially Barb Fabre and Joan LaVoy, and special recognition to Brenda Cassillius, Commissioner of Education who was instrumental in the grant and has a good relationship with White Earth and me.

White Earth has new Child Care facilities in Mahnomen and Pine Point and ground breaking will take place this spring for a new Head Start facility in Naytahwaush. Our Vocational Rehabilitation program serves ages 16 and up, also has new Day Care opening in March.

The White Earth Reservation Boys and Girls Clubs serve children and youth after school. They have youth councils that network into the newly initiated State Native Youth Advisory Council to advise on issues important to young people. Last year our Boys and Girls Clubs raised over \$1,400 to donate to Crow Creek Boys and Girls Clubs, South Dakota, who lost everything, facilities and furnishing, in a fire. Now that is commendable, White Earth youth!

The White Earth scholarship program awarded over \$800,000 in funds to post secondary students. Yet, more funds are needed for many Indian students. While I was in Washington DC last week Representative Kilde, Michigan and I talked about tuition waivers for post secondary Indian students. I knew Rep. Kilde gave the leadership for post secondary tuition waivers for Indian students in Michigan and I want to do the same in Minnesota. Financial aid is the most difficult barrier for Indian students in colleges and universities.

We will be constructing a new workforce center in Naytahwaush that collaborates with Pathways Out of Poverty Program where last year 105 students earned degrees and certificates in green energy, wind energy, entrepreneurship, home weatherization, and alternative energy manufacturing.

In partnership with Minnesota State Technical College, Detroit Lakes, 20 White Earth carpentry students have constructed three housing units during their training at Ojibwa Building Supplies, Waubun.

The White Earth Tribal and Community College is growing. It is a young college established in 1997, one of the best investments White Earth tribal government has ever made. It is fully accredited, a two year AA degree institution where students can attend closer to home and where the learning environment and courses are culturally appropriate. The College had a grand opening of Phase I classrooms in 2011 and is near completion of Phase II, a Culture and Learning Center.

White Earth Natural Resources

White Earth Natural Resources and the White Earth police have partnered on fishing events for elders and youth. The Fisheries programs stocks over 2 million walleye each year in area lakes.

This is one of my favorite times. In the autumn there is sturgeon fingerling release in White Earth Lake and Round Lake in partnership with our relatives from Rainy River, Manitou Rapids, First Nations of Canada. School children and elders are a part of the events. After the sturgeon release we feast, visit, and laugh. In the spring we travel to Rainy River for their Fish event. There will be a documentary produced on the sturgeon and our friendship with Rainy River, Manitou Rapids.

White Earth Department of Natural Resources and Tribal Council hosted the first ever meeting with a Minnesota Commissioner of Natural Resources (DNR) to discuss issues common to Tribe and State. We all felt a good relationship with the State DNR was finally ahead for us.

Human Services

During the 2011 Minnesota Legislative Session, White Earth successfully had the law passed to transfer all health and human services from Mahnomen County to the Tribe, over \$20 million in services. It is the

responsibility of the Tribe to provide health and human services to tribal members and the transition is now underway. This strengthens sovereignty and self determination.

White Earth Human Services has completed a 10 year plan to end homelessness on the White Earth Reservation. Homelessness is huge problem with three or more families crowded in one dwelling. Every week, we on the Tribal Council, are asked to find housing, a place for families, elders, and singles to live. I am pleased to report we are meeting the challenge of homelessness with solutions.

White Earth Energy Assistance provided funding to 968 families to heat and light homes during the long cold winter. CITGO assistance from the country of Venezuela has contributed much needed funds for the past seven years, helping 965 families with heat.

In May there will be a grand opening for the new Women's Shelter. Indian Country nationwide has the highest rates of domestic abuse and violence, the result of hopelessness and chemical abuse that leads to anger, turmoil, and violence. Violence begets violence, a learned behavior that is foreign to our traditions and values. We must break the cycle of domestic abuse for the sake of our families and to provide the counseling and support to heal the family unit. Our women's shelter will be a place of healing and safety.

White Earth Housing

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has provided funds to build 30 new homes, the Women's Shelter, eight elder units, and 22 home rehabilitations on the White Earth Reservation. Tax credit financing will allow the rehabilitation of 40 more homes in the near future. As aggressively and creatively as White Earth seeks funds, there remains a critical shortage of housing and housing repairs. I talked a

few minutes ago about the homelessness and the 10 year plan to end homelessness. This will take money. A home today for a family of six costs at least \$200,000 to construct. Many families want to own their own home which is an investment, to build equity, to be a source of pride but home loans at the quantity needed are not available. The economy today has been in a slump and as much as we want, we do not have control of federal and state debts that affect most Americans. We do what we can which is a lot but not enough.

Nelson Timber Settlement

Last week I was in Washington DC, testifying for the Nelson Timber Settlement. With assurance, I can report that the “train has left the station and it aint gonna stop” on the settlement distribution. The entire Minnesota congressional delegation: Senator Al Franken, Senator Amy Klobuchar, Congressman Collin Peterson and Congressman Chip Cravaack have authored bills in both Senate and House of Representatives to distribute the Nelson Timber Settlement. The timber settlement bill will pass Congress and be signed by President Obama. Each tribal member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe will receive a \$300 per capita payment. Remember it was White Earth that held to the per capita distribution. I have asked when we will receive the funds and the answer is, “at least six months.”

Gaming World International (GWI) Lawsuit

The GWI judgment award to the White Earth Tribe is now \$19 million with interest accumulating at \$2,000 per day. The judgment against Angelo Medure and GWI has been upheld by the White Earth Tribal Court of Appeals and the State District Court. It has taken a long time, too long, but eventually justice will be done and the people of White Earth will recover the \$11 million plus interest (now \$19 million and growing) that Angelo Medure and GWI stole while managing Shooting

Star Casino, 1991-96. Included in the theft is our White Earth Land Settlement Act (WELSA) funds. As I think about this egregious theft, the words of Winston Churchill come to mind, “Never, never, never, give up.”

Economic Development

White Earth Tribal Government, Shooting Star Casino, Hotel and Event Center, White Earth Housing, White Earth Tribal and Community College, tribal schools, and tribal enterprises contribute millions and millions of dollars to the local economy [look at the financial report]. Yet we must diversify, separate businesses from government, and continue to develop the infrastructure with public safety, independent court system, education and training, roads and transportation, housing, fire protection, etc, all necessary for economic development, industry, entrepreneurship, and jobs to thrive.

Nothing that I know of starts without capital which is money that White Earth needs. We can develop all the models, plans, and structures but without capital we do not go far.

White Earth Metro Casino Proposal, aka Minnesota Wins

Last October I met with Governor Mark Dayton to find out if he was interested in a White Earth casino/hotel proposal located in the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area that would share profits with the State. I said to the Governor that White Earth has the credibility to finance, construct, own, and manage a \$700 million casino resort that will yield a conservative projection of \$300 million a year in net profits. A portion of the profits will be shared with the State.

Funds were needed to construct a new Viking Stadium or the Vikings would leave Minnesota. A White Earth metro casino was a solution, an

offer, to the State to use its portion of profits from the White Earth metro casino for the new stadium.

I asked Governor Dayton, “Are you interested?” He replied, “Yes, very interested.” He indicated he would rather use the State portion of profits from the White Earth metro casino for other needs such as paying back the education funds.

Of course, the profits to the State would be a decision of the Governor and Legislature. White Earth had offered the solution that would benefit State, Vikings, and most of all, our Tribe.

The meeting with the Governor had been productive and the White Earth Tribal Council moved forward with our metro casino proposal.

At a legislative hearing held in St. Paul on December 6, 2011, along with many proposals to fund a Viking stadium, I testified for the White Earth metro casino---to share a portion of the net profits with the State---as solution to funding the Viking stadium. Of all the proposals heard that day, White Earth had the most feasible one because no public funds were required. Other proposals required some sort of public subsidy that cities, counties, or people of Minnesota would not want to put forth.

Later in December we had our annual employee Christmas dinner. I stood before many here to explain the White Earth metro casino: that at minimum, it means \$150 million per year to our Tribe for housing, education, infrastructure, health care, elder and youth services, and economic development that will benefit all White Earth members.

The White Earth Nation would own and manage a \$700 million gaming facility in the metro area of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The facility would employ 2,500 during construction and 2,000 when opened. Not one

penny or asset will pledged from any existing tribal funds or properties. Tribal sovereignty is protected, in fact, strengthened because the metro gaming will be a business agreement between the Tribe and State, similar to other tribal/state casinos throughout the Country.

I said, "We can sit here on the Reservation, continue to depend on grants that are dwindling every year due to national economy, get by with \$7-8 million per year from Shooting Star Casino profits that are simply due to our remote location, have \$400 million in unmet needs, high unemployment, poor health care, on and on OR we can be future oriented, courageous, and step out to invest, own, and manage a metro casino/hotel that will bring \$150 million or more to the White Earth Nation. The choice was obvious. We will move forward on the metro casino/hotel, be courageous and innovative because it is the right thing to do for our Tribe."

In 2005 the White Earth Nation partnered with Governor Pawlenty on a tribal/state casino in the metro area of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The Leech Lake and Red Lake tribes were a part of the tribal/state casino until politics and pressure got to be too much and they dropped out.

Governor Pawlenty asked me what White Earth wanted to do, being the only tribe left. I thought a few seconds to answer him. I thought about all the needs in our Reservation and among our people everywhere. I said, "Governor, I want to ahead for White Earth. We have great need in our Tribe." Governor Pawlenty said, "We will go forward and do our best."

Our tribal/state casino bill went to the final hour of the 2005 Legislative Session when the Legislature decided to use the health impact fee rather than the revenue from the tribal/state casino to balance the State budget.

Today the State is in a deeper financial debt than 2005. Minnesotans do not want any more taxes. State budgets have been cut to the bone. Our stars have lined up and the opportunity is at hand to get our metro tribal casino that will change our future from night to day.

There are naysayers who are against the White Earth metro casino. They are critical, negative, non-believers in what is possible.

I have never listened to naysayers who do not know any better or try their hardest to make one fail. As a 17 year old student, if I had listened to the BIA counselor who told me I was not college material, I would have never seen the doors of a college much less Harvard University.

Let us keep our eye on the prize, the goal, and move forward to achieve the White Earth metro casino, the Minnesota Wins bill introduced in the State Legislature. It is the right thing to do for our people, our Tribe, and our future.

As we go onward, we put our trust in God, Manidoo, pray for strength and guidance. We will do our utmost best, keep our faith, and leave the rest to our Creator God. If we do not get our metro casino; it was not meant to be at this time.

There is a story in the Bible that guides me. It is about a king named Solomon. (King Solomon is also in secular ancient history.) One night the Lord appeared to Solomon in dream and asked him what he wanted. Solomon answered, "I am but a child, do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of your chosen people, a great nation, therefore, give your servant an understanding heart, to know the difference between good and bad, to make wise decisions." It pleased God that Solomon asked nothing for himself, did not ask for a long life or riches, or the life of his enemies but asked for understanding and wisdom to lead his people. God blessed Solomon.

My prayer is King Solomon's prayer. We are a chosen people, a great nation. Our part is to do our best to serve others, to make our Nation better for generations to come. Remember, we will forever be known for the tracks we leave.

May God bless you, your families, and the Great White Earth Nation.

Me-qwitch.