

State of the Nation Address  
White Earth Nation of Anishinaabe  
Erma J. Vizenor, Chairwoman  
Thursday, April 3, 2014  
Shooting Star Event Center  
Mahnomen, MN

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

Tribal Council, distinguished guests, friends, relatives, and citizens of the great White Earth Nation, miigwech (thank you) for your presence today.

Thank you to spiritual leader Sunfish Oppegaard for the pipe ceremony and prayers; the White Earth Tribal and Community College Drum Group, the White Earth Honor Guard, and Randy Goodwin, our Master of Ceremonies.

We are proud of our students from Naytahwaush Community Charter School for singing the National Anthem. It is incredibly inspiring to hear children sing and to share our sacred Ojibwemowin. I always feel confident for the future when I see and hear the children. Thank you.

Today is a special event to thank all of our employees who work in our tribal government, gaming, housing, schools, college, and business enterprises. We have wonderful showcases and displays of tribal programs.

Thank you Jennifer Stevens and the rest of the WECARE team for the introduction to the latest White Earth initiative, which will bring together many of our programs to better serve the people of the White Earth Nation. This new revolutionary approach is being watched closely

at the federal and state level as the model of service delivery for the future.

The 2014 State of the Nation Report is impressive. White Earth tribal government has grown exponentially over the past decade. We are a government of progress and success, and we will continue to push many initiatives forward working towards our mission: to preserve, promote and enhance our quality of life. Thank you to Carlene Hisgun, Michael Neusser, and Gary W. Padrta for the photos, news, and layout of Report.

The purpose of the State of the Nation address is to give a public report on tribal business, finances, past year accomplishments, challenges, plans and goals.

The President of the United States is required by the Constitution to give the nation an annual report, usually in January. Governors and mayors give annual reports. Leaders have the duty and responsibility to give an annual public report on the status or condition of our nations, tribes, states, and cities.

The new Constitution of the White Earth Nation, Chapter 11: The President, Article 11, states, "The President shall deliver an annual address dedicated to the State of the White Earth Nation." Chapter 13: Secretary Treasure, Article 5, states, "The Secretary Treasure shall provide and publish an annual fiscal report and accounting of the White Earth Nation." The new Constitution requires accountability and public disclosure.

This past year the tribal council voted to move forward with allowing the tribal membership to vote and decide on constitution reform. On November 19, 2013, the Constitution of the White Earth Nation passed overwhelmingly with 79.61% (80%) vote in a record turnout election. The people of White Earth have spoken strong and clear for a new

constitution that has the checks and balances in government, a separate judicial system, and the elimination of the blood quantum that ensures our great nation will endure and prosper forever.

As your Tribal Chairwoman, I have your mandate to finish the constitutional process, to get the Constitution of the White Earth Nation recognized and implemented. I will travel to U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, DC in two weeks to meet with Assistant Secretary Kevin Washburn on recognition of our new constitution. 80% of the voters in the largest tribe in Minnesota have the right to our own self-determination.

Constitutional reform at White Earth is not new. It has been a long 17 years, starting with the first Constitutional Reform Committee in 1997. I have said, "I have a deep love for our people and I believe that this Constitution will meet the needs of our people in the many generations to come." In-qwa-mus (It is time) to finish it.

White Earth continues with the transfer of all Health and Human Services from Mahnomen, Becker, and Clearwater counties. When the transfer is complete, every tribal member and their families who reside in these three counties will be served by the White Earth Nation. The State law for the transfer was passed in 2011. It has taken time and upfront expense, such as hiring and training caseworkers, processing the reimbursements for services, installing 17 miles of fast speed internet in the Naytahwaush area, and securing office space in area towns such as Detroit Lakes and Bagley.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services and Commissioner are very supportive but had no start up funds for White Earth. White Earth has been creating the boilerplate for other tribes to transfer human and health services. Recently, Jerome Lhotka, executive director and I were successful to get \$750,000 from State Legislature.

Special thank you to Senators Rod Skoe and Tom Bakk, Representative Jim Abeler who authored the White Earth transfer legislation; and Speaker of the House Paul Thissen. The transfer of Human and Health Services from Counties to Tribe is a historic step in self-governance self-determination, exercising sovereignty and developing our infrastructure and economy.

It is projected that the White Earth Nation will serve 32,000 clients. That is growth and progress. Thank you to our great staff, Ben Bement, Jamie Stewart, Mary Reigert, Pat Butler, and so many others who took this challenge with the highest competence. On new initiatives, I often hear from State and Federal officials, "If any tribe can do it, White Earth is the one."

We continue to build and provide more services to our people, such as Giiwaniikimin Supportive Housing Project and Work Force Development Center in Naytahwaush; a new Kidney Dialysis Center in partnership with Sanford Health; establishment of White Earth Renewable Energy Solutions with the erection of a 750 kilo watt wind turbine (the third turbine), solar panel installations and a planned biomass boiler plant at Shooting Star Casino; a new community center at Elbow Lake, and complete remodel of StarMart convenience store and gas station in Mahnomen. We are growing in every aspect of our business and service oriented programming.

Within two weeks, the White Earth Housing Authority will start Tax V, a \$7 million tax credit project that totally rehabilitates 35 homes on the Reservation. All supplies will be purchased at Ojibwa Building Supply and the project oversight will be done by White Earth Builders, a component of White Earth Enterprises, LLC. White Earth Housing Authority has the first clean 2014 audit, no findings. Congratulations to Director Jen McDougall, White Earth Housing Board, and employees.

I have good news for our veterans! I will read the announcement as it came from the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council Legislative Update. "The American Indian Veteran's Plaque, an effort championed by Chairwoman Vizenor, will be installed in the Capitol's Court of Honor this Spring in May. The proposed date for the ceremony is May 22nd, 2014. The date is being secured and there will be more information to come regarding the details of this ceremony to honor our American Indian veterans who have bravely served in the Armed Forces at a rate proportionately higher than any other population." Yes, esteemed veterans, we will travel to St. Paul in May for your honoring.

The Traditions, Language, and Culture (TLC) Committee is active with 120 Ojibwe language tables, 39 cultural classes, a billboard campaign to learn Ojibwemowin, and supports traditional berry, wild rice and sugar bush camps.

On January 19, 90 youth and chaperones from White Earth Boys and Girls Clubs participated at the Native American Heritage Day sponsored by Minnesota Swarm Lacrosse Team, Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce and the American Indian communities of Minneapolis/St. Paul. The Minnesota Swarm game was so exciting but we all stood up to see our own Dennis Williams play exhibition lacrosse at half time. Through continued efforts to reintroduce the Creator's game to our youth, White Earth will be hosting a lacrosse camp for our youth this summer in partnership with the Minnesota Swarm and the Army National Guard.

Public safety is always a high priority. As you know, the White Earth Nation was the first tribe in the country to implement the Tribal Law and Order Act (TLOA) passed by Congress in 2010. TLOA allows the federal government joint jurisdiction with State and Tribe in prosecuting major crimes that occur on the White Earth Reservation. Tribal Peace Officer and Community Liaison Merlin Deegan has organized talking circles throughout the White Earth Reservation to

combat substance abuse as part of the Gaawiin Giiyaabi “No More!” campaign. Thank you to Public Safety Director/Chief Randy Goodwin and his police department.

During this year the Tribal Council and I will work hard for a new adult residential substance abuse treatment facility on the White Earth Reservation. Currently there are 39 civil commitment individuals for treatment and no place for them to go. White Earth desperately needs an adult residential treatment facility like we have for youth at Oshki Manidoo Youth Facility, Bemidji.

Sequestration or automatic across the board cuts to federal government agencies for at least 10 years effects funding for White Earth. This is a real challenge in the future. Budget cuts of 5 percent were implemented last year. Between 5-10 percent budget cuts for the coming year are a reality. Last August, Senator Al Franken met with tribal leaders in St. Paul to hear the impact of sequestration to tribes. Most mandatory programs, such as Medicaid and Social Security, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, TANF or welfare were exempt; however low-income programs, notably Section 8 housing vouchers, aid for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) are subject to cuts. The economy has been spiraling down which has impacted the gaming revenue, not only Shooting Star Casino but other tribes have experienced declines as people are spending less at casinos. Now and in the days to come, the Tribal Council has to adjust to budget cuts and work harder and smarter with our revenue generating programs

Recently, Burny Tibbetts, our Director of Roads, Transportation, and Public Works organized a national summit of 100 tribes in Denver to call for necessary funds for Indian roads and bridges. I spoke at the summit. Roads in Indian Country are not safe. There are not adequate funds for maintenance. Tribes need to unite and go to Congress. My words to tribal leaders and Congress, “If United States can spend 4-6

Trillion dollars on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, \$53 billion to nation build in Iraq, then Congress can do some nation building in Indian Country, provide funds to fix our roads so they are safe for every day drivers, children riding school buses, emergency vehicles such as fire trucks, ambulances and police.”

Thankfully, this year our White Earth Transit received \$500,000 operational funds from Congress. With gas prices at \$3.59 per gallon the White Earth Transit is a necessity for many to go to work and school.

The 1855 Treaty Authority and the White Earth Nation have taken the position to oppose the Sandpiper Enbridge Pipeline Project that is scheduled to go through the northeast part of the White Earth Reservation. White Earth and Leech Lake Nations will file an injunction in White Earth Tribal Court to stop the pipeline project. The days have come to an end when gigantic corporations, such as Enbridge, and the Public Utilities Commission, think they can go through our territory and jurisdiction without talking first to the White Earth Tribal Council. Note: The 1855 Treaty Authority is comprised of White Earth, Leech Lake, and Sandy Lake near Mille Lacs. It was established five years to exercise our reserved rights within 13 million acres of ceded territory. Terry Tibbetts, White Earth, is the Chairman of the 1855 Treaty Authority.

Congratulations are in order: To Ron Valiant who retired from his 13 years as Executive Director; to Mike Swan who retired from over 20 years as Director of White Earth Natural Resources (thank you, Ron and Mike for your dedication and service); to Jerome Lhotka who is our new Executive Director; to the Mahnomen High School Football team for winning the State Class 1A Championship; to Naytahwaush Community Charter School for improving their reading and math test results; to Pine Point students for creating the Pine Point Press newspaper; to Circle of Life Academy for the 6th successful Science Fair; and to White

Earth Nation for marketing Organic Wild Rice in seven natural Foods Stores in Minneapolis area.

Congratulations to TJ Oshie, a son of the White Earth Nation, U.S. Men's Olympic Hockey Team, who captured the spirit of the country in the 2014 Olympics, Sochi, Russia when he converted four of six shootout chances against Russia. President Obama tweeted congratulations to TJ and the team after the win over Russia.

According to news reports when general manager David Poile and the selection committee chose the U.S. Olympic team roster, Poile said, "You know at some point we are going to end up in a shootout and we are going want TJ Oshie."

In 2005, the Minnesota Indian Education Association awarded TJ Oshie with the Student Athlete of the Year Award when he was a student at Warroad High School, Warroad, Minn.

On behalf of the White Earth Nation, the Tribal Council and I will officially honor TJ in the near future. We are proud of TJ, a national hero!

We are excited and proud of the progress we have made this past year and we look forward to continued opportunities to build our future.

May God, Gitchi-Manidou, bless and be with you and your families. May God bless the great White Earth Nation. Miigwech!  
Thank you!