

# Listening, planning and finding the right path



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Aanii, Anishnaabek!

The extreme cold of our northern winter causes trees to pop, roads to freeze over and freighters to get stuck in the river. This serves as a good reminder to us to not be so rigid that we break into pieces with a strong wind, to be careful of our footing so we do not fall and to not let the cold that surrounds us keep us from moving forward, even if it is against the current.

The past year has caused our board of directors to be very strong in the harsh wind known as “sequestration.” It was a difficult time and we did not come through it unscathed. The heavy impact of sequestration caused many “cracks” in the manner in which we normally operated. However, we did not break into pieces.

Despite the insecurity of not knowing what Congress was going to do to our funding, we took care with our “footing” and did not fall. We made budget decisions and persevered. Sequestration was a terrible blow, but it did not destroy us.

Right now, I see our board is much like the freighter I recently saw stuck in the St. Mary’s River. Moving forward was next to impossible without a plan. But a plan was made and implemented, and the giant boat broke free and moved forward against the current to the benefit of all. I, and other board members too, feel that it

is time our tribe had a plan. The time for crisis management is long past, and a vision needs to be brought forward to ensure that future generations of our people are considered and taken care of, it is our way.

It is not dependent on just one person to make such a plan. It is not up to the chairman. It is not dependent on just the board of directors either. Nor is it dependent solely on the citizens of our tribe. I believe it takes all of us to find the right path. It will be a very difficult time, but the process itself should not be. It’s an easy task in some ways, requiring one important skill: LISTENING.

Listen for the “good,” not the “hate.” Listen to the small voice with a good thought, not the loud voice with no thought at all. Listen to suggestion, not accusation; for help, not hurt. Listen for the guidance of the Creator, it comes quietly, almost in a whisper and sometimes in the words of a child, if you pay attention, and really listen, you will hear it.

Recently, I listened to the voice of a child and realized that our tribe had no law in place regarding bullying. I recalled the many times as a teacher, when I held a child as he or she cried because of the cruelty of bullying. I knew that schools, cities and even President Obama addressed this act of violence that can destroy a life, and yet I discovered that our tribe had not. And so as I wrote in my last article, I researched, and wrote the following legislation and was so grateful that it passed unanimously on our Dec. 17, 2013, board of directors meeting:

*“Whereas, it is necessary to ensure for the perpetuation of our Anishinaabe way of life, and the teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, and*

*“Whereas, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians recognizes that bullying is a pervasive problem that can have negative consequences for our tribal communities and for the right of our citizens to live in a safe environment without fear, and*

*“Whereas, bullying is comprised of direct behaviors such as words, conduct, social media publication, that are initiated by one or more individuals against an individual, as well as indirect behaviors such as spreading rumors and acting in other ways to cause a person to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion, with all such behaviors, direct or indirect, amounting to physical or psychological intimidation occurring repeatedly over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse; and*

*“Whereas, bullying for too long has gone unchallenged in our communities, and*

*“Whereas, those who stand by passively watching or actively encouraging bullying are also affected by these hostile acts;*

*“Therefore be it resolved, that the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians support policies and programs that address the prevention, intervention, and elimination of bullying; and*

*“Resolved, that to bring about an atmosphere of zero tolerance*

*for bullying behavior, and an attitude that bullying behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in our communities, enterprises, homes, schools, playgrounds or any place within our tribal jurisdiction; and*

*Be it finally resolved, that the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians hereby directs that legal code be drafted by tribal legal staff within 14 days of this resolution. (NOTE: Amended to 45 days).”*

It has been a sad reflection on our tribe, that there are those who wanted the politicians exempted from this law. It is sad that this same politician has been attempting to smear my motives, and otherwise discredit a law that is good, just and needed. Anti-bullying laws do not interfere with anyone’s “freedom of speech.” If they did, there would be no anti-bullying laws anywhere! So, I choose to listen for the “good,” not the “hate;” Listen to the small voice with a good thought, not the loud voice with no thought at all; listen to suggestion, not accusation; for help, not hurt.

Like the freighter that was stuck in the St. Mary’s River, I am moving forward. Sequestration cannot keep me in one place, nor will the hate-filled Internet posts, texts and emails I receive. Listening to the “good,” I am acting on what our people told me when I was running for office. I have recently met with, and have been listening to members who have “suggestions.” Listening to our people, I have already begun to work on plans that focus on education, employment and ways to support our way of life.

This New Year is looking better and better. Chi-Miigwech to all of my supporters, and to those who are truly interested in moving our tribe forward. Please keep sending me your thoughts and ideas!

Anishinaabe gagige  
(Anishinaabe for always)!

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