

McLeod addresses DOJ on Violence Against Women



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Aaniin, Anishnaabek! Since 2013, I have been a member of the Department of Justice Intertribal working group focusing on the implementation of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) in Indian Country. It has been an historic couple of years as tribes across the nation have implemented the federal authorization to prosecute non-Indians who harm Indian women on tribal land. Nov. 1, I traveled to the Squaxin Island Indian Community for two days of domestic violence meetings, and then on Nov. 4, I attended the consultation session of the Department of Justice. As usual, the DOJ paid for my travel, not the tribe.

I wrote the following speech and read it when it was my turn to speak. Many people from many tribes were there to also offer their testimony, and share the hardships of their communi-

ties. It was a mix of victories and sufferings, however after listening to the testimony of our Alaskan brothers and sisters, I became stronger in my tone and went off script a couple of times.

The Alaskan testimony that affected me the greatest, was the story of an eleven-year-old girl who was beaten to death, stripped naked and had to lay in wait for law enforcement to arrive for three days. THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS her family could do nothing for their baby girl, knowing she had been killed, knowing that precious little girl lay in wait for help, for dignity, for justice.

I felt the heartbreak of the grandma who was there, as she told how they protected the body. I saw tears fall from her eyes and watched as other Alaskan women got up and put a hand on her shoulder, a tissue in her hand and stood close to her in solidarity and love.

It was so very hard to realize that the Alaskan tribes are almost totally neglected by a federal government that so recently took everything from them. It was hard to realize how desperate their lives are. I was humbled by their pain. When it was my turn to speak, I first introduced myself in our language with the proper protocol. I acknowledged two of our tribal women who were also there (Lori Jump and Jami Moran) for their dedication to the protection of our women and the fight against domestic violence. I could not do my job without Lori and Jami's help and guidance.

Jennifer' testimony — My tribe will provide its formal consultation remarks in writing. I am speaking to you today as an elected official of the tribe, an elder, grandmother, mother and an Anishnaabekwe (Ojibwe woman). By profession, I am an educator and school administrator. I spent many years in the classroom teaching my students many things, including the 3Rs — 'readin', 'ritin' and 'rithmetic.

Today, in my teacher mode I desire to teach the Department of Justice and the federal government another set of 3Rs — RECOGNITION, RESPONSIBILITY and RESPECT.

The first R — recognition. Our status is embedded in and thus acknowledged by the Constitution of the United States of America. We are NOT colonies, municipalities or states. We are nations. Nations with whom TREATIES were made. In those treaties, our tribal nations agreed to allow the nation of the United States to grow and become its own sovereign in exchange for various goods, services, etc. The "trust relationship" was formed. The United States willingly accepted the second R — RESPONSIBILITY to fulfill their part of the treaties. Through those treaties, every service of the Department of Justice to tribal nations have been pre-paid. We have upheld our part. In my best "teacher-speak," I am saying this is not acceptable.

The third R — RESPECT. How

do tribal nations gain the FULL respect of the DOJ and the federal government? Because I don't see it.

It is NOT respectful to treat nations in such a manner that they must deal with a lower-level government (states) for access to federal dollars that are needed for the protection of their people. Does the U.S. do that to the Middle Eastern nations that ask for federal monies to protect their citizens? No. Are they required to "apply" and meet 61 criteria first? No. But, it IS what tribal nations must do.

It is also NOT respectful to pit tribal nation against tribal nation to COMPETE for resources. To me, this is history repeating itself. The tribe that successfully signs an "X" on the paper gets everything, and the other tribes get nothing. Again, unacceptable. To the five board members who voted "yes," I say "miigwetch," and appreciate your support of the work that I am doing for our people. To the other four, there is nothing to say. Their vote is their vote. But, it does show me one of two things: either it's personal or they do not support my work against domestic violence. I was surprised at first, but perhaps I shouldn't have been. The reasoning for the "NO" vote is of no concern to me. I know this work is important, just ask the families of any woman who has been abused or, better yet, ask the family of the eleven year old girl who lay dead for three days waiting for a police officer to come.

VAWA, other domestic violence and lack of DOJ funding are important issues that I am proud to work on for our tribe and I intent to continue doing so.

In this month of Thanksgiving, I have so much to be thankful for. My family, my students, my work and the members of our tribe who made it possible for me to be where I am today. I am grateful for the gift of knowing that what I am doing matters. But this year, I am grateful for so much more, things I never thought about, like roads. Alaskan women and children are living in desolation with only airplanes and boats for transportation. They have no roads. I am also grateful to our law enforcement and emergency personnel. I know if I need help, they have roads that will get them to me quickly, and they will gladly come at a moment's notice. This month, I am humbled by the many blessings that I have, both known and unknown. On this Thanksgiving holiday, may you all have the love of family, the blessings of good health, safe homes and happy lives.

Shawindeckaa (Many blessings),

Anishnaabe gagige
(Anishnaabe for always) - Jen
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Feel free to contact me with questions, comments, or if you or someone you know could use my help. Happy Thanksgiving!