

**Courageous Leadership:
Our Veterans, Active Military Personnel, and Our Community**

**State of the Band Address
By Chief Executive Marge Anderson
January 12, 2010**

Aaniin. Mr. Speaker, members of the Band Assembly, Madam Chief Justice, Justices, Commissioners, Band members, and guests, I am grateful to join you here today.

I am here today to talk about courageous leadership.

We all know and admire people who have made difficult or unpopular decisions because they were the right decisions. We all know people who have consistently put others' needs ahead of their own.

What they have in common is not common at all. It is courageous leadership.

I want to introduce you to one of those courageous leaders. He is not here today. His name is Private First Class Wesley Eagle, who grew up on the Mille Lacs Reservation.

Wesley served in the Marines during World War II. He fought against Japanese soldiers at the famous battle of Iwo Jima.

Wesley was a rifleman and fire group leader. His company was pinned down by enemy fire. This made it nearly impossible to evacuate wounded soldiers. Wesley bravely ordered his fire group to attack, to help divert enemy fire until the injured could be moved to safer ground. Even though Wesley was severely wounded while making the attack, he refused to be evacuated.

Eventually he was the only rifleman left in his platoon. Despite multiple injuries, Wesley continued to lead his men until he was fatally wounded.

Private First Class Wesley Eagle was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross to recognize his “extraordinary heroism” and “dauntless leadership.”

Wesley Eagle makes me proud to be a Mille Lacs Band member. At a young age, in a horrific place, he showed courageous leadership. He was one of nearly 50 Band members who bravely served in World War II.

The Mille Lacs Band has sent many of its own to serve our country. They have brought us tremendous honor. I want to thank them for their selflessness and the example they have set for others.

Will all of the veterans here today please stand and be recognized? [LEAD APPLAUSE]

Mii gwech to all of you for your service to the United States of America and the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. And mii gwech to the many Band members who served and have since passed on.

Four Band members are serving in the military today:

- Nathan Nickaboine is stationed with the U.S. Army in Iraq.
- Meisha Oswaldson is stationed with the U.S. Army in Fort Knox, Kentucky.
- Tony Pike is back in the U.S. after being stationed in Iraq with the 34th Red Bull Infantry Division of the Minnesota Army National Guard.
- And Quintin Sam is stationed on the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Miramar in San Diego, California. He is awaiting deployment to Afghanistan.

Mii gwech to Nathan, Meisha, Tony, Quintin, and their families. Will the family members please stand and be recognized? [LEAD APPLAUSE]

The individuals we have recognized today give us all a lot to think about. They have not put their own wants and needs first. Instead, they have chosen service.

Last year at this time, I told you on my first day of office that I came to lead with integrity, transparency and accountability. I vowed to restore your trust in tribal government.

I stand before you today to tell you that the Band government's commitment to integrity, transparency and accountability has remained top of mind every day since the last State of the Band.

Courageous leadership – and ethical leadership – are words to live by.

I said at State of the Band last year that our businesses would face a challenging year in the midst of an economic recession. And I said that the tribal government would do everything possible to limit the impact on Band members.

As a result, the government tightened its budgets and froze wages. These were difficult things to do. But our decisions helped Band members keep their jobs. These decisions kept the distribution payments to Band members at the same levels. These were the right decisions.

I know there has been some doubt about whether the tribal government is really working for Band members. I understand the question, and I will not avoid it.

The Mille Lacs Band deserves to never have a leader who is here for any reason other than to serve Band members... just like the Band deserves to always have a membership that demands accountability. Governments that function best have ethical leaders and engaged followers.

We all have a role to play in government. And we all need to work together.

I am calling on all Band members, now more than ever, to unite as a people. Focus on building on the positives. Focus on overcoming the negatives that could tear our community apart.

We see the positives every day.

- At the Time to Talk Forum at Grand Casino Mille Lacs in October, students from Nay Ah Shing, Isle, and Onamia schools had the courage to talk about conquering racism in our region.
- Last spring through fall, our Nay Ah Shing students grew produce for the whole school in their vegetable garden.
- The Nay Ah Shing We ROC members and their chaperones also built gardens at the District I Assisted Living Units (ALU).
- Another impressive program at Nay Ah Shing is AIBL – American Indian Business Leaders. Our middle school and high school AIBL chapters both won third place nationally for their business plans last spring. Our AIBL students were also recently honored with a Spirit of the People award from the Minnesota American Indian Chamber of Commerce.
- In December, 11 Nay Ah Shing sixth graders were the school’s fourth class to graduate from Drug Abuse Resistance Education, or DARE. DARE gives students the skills to avoid drugs, gangs and violence. Mii gwech to Josh Kimball, the school’s resource officer, who taught the course, and to all of the previous instructors. I read all of these students’ essays, and they made me proud to be their leader.
- The girls’ softball teams at Nay Ah Shing are another highlight. Seven of our players were selected to play in the Baxter All-Star Games this summer. Will everyone involved in We ROC, AIBL, DARE, and the girls’ softball teams please stand? [LEAD APPLAUSE]
- Nay Ah Shing students have excelled in many other ways too. Several of them took part in the school’s third annual triathlon, and collectively they reached state academic standards for the year that many other schools did not meet.
- I also want to recognize our Department of Health and Human Services, which is offering H1N1 vaccinations to every Band member to help protect our community. The health and

human services team is also working with Mille Lacs Health System to bring a dialysis unit to our community. This will make life easier for so many people.

- We have a new legal aid office, which helps ensure that Band members have the access they deserve to legal representation.
- Finally, I want to thank Band members for the progress we have made in voter turnout over the past few elections. You have taken the responsibility to vote very seriously. Because of you, we can feel better about the people who represent us at all levels of government.

Those are just a few of the many positive things happening in the Mille Lacs Band right now. There is so much potential when we unite.

Another opportunity we have for uniting this year is the U.S. Census. This is critical for the Mille Lacs Band. When you agree to be counted, you help ensure that enough federal dollars will flow into our community. Only by getting an accurate count of Band members will we receive enough funding for health care, education, and social welfare programs.

But I also have to recognize what might be our biggest failure to date – a failure that I intend to lead the way in reversing. Our community has failed to provide a safe, nurturing place for our youth to grow.

We have accepted poor work habits by some of our adults, the people who are supposed to be role models. We have been taken advantage of by the dishonesty of people we trusted.

We also see gang activity, sexual and physical violence, and drug and alcohol abuse all around us. Much of this has been ignored, turned into conspiracy theories, or accepted as normal.

Sometimes the problems were put aside because the families – including my own – have included people we respect... government officials, Elders, and others. So many of us have looked away. We have been held back by our fear and embarrassment.

The result has been more violence, more gang activity, and more drug and alcohol abuse. This has led to more kids underperforming – even failing – in school.

By not holding our loved ones accountable, we are teaching our young people that it's okay to misbehave. We are teaching them a code of silence.

But we cannot wish or pretend our problems away. We cannot accept violence, gang activity, and drug and alcohol abuse. If we do, these problems will destroy us one by one... family by family... until our very culture is destroyed.

Our youth deserve to grow up in a community that is safe and healthy. A community with real role models – real Native pride.

Some of our people think that tattoos and clothing can show their Native pride. But how could Native pride ever be associated with stealing, bullying, or hurting one another? How could Native pride lead us down a path to addiction, failure in school, or violence?

If we want to show real Native pride, we will not be afraid or ashamed to admit that we have problems to solve. We will show courageous leadership.

Youth, you are our ambassadors of hope. That's why I am making it my charge this year to work with you on a new definition for Native pride. Not the gangster definition, but the real pride of knowing who you are... where you come from... and how our language, culture and ceremonies can help you in your daily lives.

It is my charge – and the charge of the other elected officials – to make your health, safety and future our number one priority. The other elected officials and I are committed to working with each other on this issue beginning immediately.

I think the best way to start is to publicly proclaim – right here and right now – that our community is in trouble with violence, gang activity, and addiction.

The next step will be to develop a plan and set aside resources to combat these issues. Then we need to support our commissioners, educators, and law enforcement agencies to do their jobs – regardless of how difficult the job will be.

It will take a great deal of courage from all of us. It will be hard to recognize the problems that exist in our own houses, our own families, our own neighborhoods. But it will get done under my leadership. And it will show our youth what real role models do.

At times it will seem that by tackling our problems, we are not standing together. We are telling on this neighbor, or picking on that relative.

But in order to be a community that can stand the test of time, we need to think of all of us... all of our children... the greater good. A community cannot thrive where people live in fear and shame. We need to eliminate the sources of that fear and shame.

This could be the greatest test of our unity as the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. But if we wait and watch any longer, we will self-destruct.

And we will have no one on the outside to blame – no Mille Lacs County, no racists, no people wanting a piece of the casino gaming pie. We will have just ourselves to blame.

This will not happen on my watch.

The Band will be calling on good role models to get involved. We need people who are courageous enough to fight for the future of our kids. And we need the troublemakers to know that we will not tolerate their behavior.

Commissioners, I have several directives for you in the coming year.

To John Dunkley, Commissioner of Administration, and Assistant Commissioner of Administration Carol Shaw, I direct you to continue providing leadership in rebuilding the Mille Lacs Band government.

Continue promoting collaboration between the legislative and executive branches. I also direct you to develop procedures for the day-to-day activity of each Band commissioner. Further, consider how we can reorganize the TANF, TERO and workforce departments to better serve Band members.

John and Carol, I direct you to explore the possibility of constructing a public safety building that has a jail and office space for tribal police officers and police staff. In addition, look into the possibility of the Band implementing its own 911 dispatch system, which would assist callers and send tribal police officers to respond to Band member emergencies.

To Michael Garrow, Commissioner of Corporate Affairs, I direct you to identify operating efficiencies so that revenue distributions to Band members remain strong. I also direct you to identify ways to increase Band member employment, and to recommend sound new business investments.

To Jennifer Waltman, Commissioner of Community Development, I direct you to develop and implement a Native Community Development Financial Institution to help transition the Small Business Development Program into a program that creates better opportunities for Band member entrepreneurs. In addition, I direct you to develop a green building initiative to help ensure that what we build on this earth also respects the earth. I also want you to form a plan to rebuild aging community infrastructure, including water and sewer systems.

To Dennis Olson, Commissioner of Education, I direct you to take the Ojibwe Language Program to the next level. This includes all school language programs, as well as the Community Recreation and Sports Program and activities at the Immersion Grounds.

The goal is to grow Ojibwe language teachers from within, utilizing the Immersion Grounds and the schools. Students will also be required to reach proficiency benchmarks in speaking ability and retention.

I also direct you to develop a Boys and Girls Club in each district, which will include a reorganization of the current Community Recreation and Sports Program. Finally, develop a youth governing board, and pursue an early education facility to address our urgent need for space to help Band children learn and grow.

To Don Eubanks, Commissioner of Health and Human Services, I direct you to reform Circle of Health. We need to return Circle of Health to its original focus, which was obtaining health insurance for Band members. Second, I direct you to enhance our family services to help keep Band families intact. Third, enhance the Band's holistic care services by making screenings available for behavioral health, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse.

To Curt Kalk, Commissioner of Natural Resources, I direct you to improve our water quality standards and establish environmental cleanup standards for spills and pollution releases. I also direct you to complete future land use maps for the Band that match our land use ordinances.

Further, I direct you to promote wild rice growth in Lake Ogechie by restoring historic water levels. Band members' ability to harvest wild rice is invaluable to our culture.

The work that lies ahead will take a government with tremendous commitment and integrity. It will require the entire Band membership to hold others accountable for their actions. It will take courageous leadership from both the people we expect, and the people who are unlikely heroes.

We don't need to look any further than our own Mille Lacs Band for inspiration. We are fortunate to have people like Wesley Eagle, the many veterans among us, and others who have lived their lives with real Native pride, real courage. Let their examples lead us down the path to a united Non-Removable Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe.

Mii gwech.