

Dear Fellow Tribal Members,

Observing the election, I was recalling the 1975 *Grey Iron Foundry* project the tribe once lost in the final stages before construction because of our internal infighting, when the usual question arose in my mind: Are these people crazy, jealous, or just personally greedy? Whether the project was successful or not is irrelevant. It wasn't successful, but some people, their progeny, and anyone they can influence are still trying to destroy our continued successes. But no project even had a chance because we kept attacking and changing our tribal administrations to satisfy one rump group (some larger than others) after another, until good sense finally came into fashion.

In the early 1980s, years of litigation and then a risky physical confrontation eliminated the illegal outside management contract, allowing the tribe to take control of our Bingo Hall and its profits. By 1985, our government stabilized to the point that plans could not only be made, but carried out and capitalized, to provide the economic base on which we now realize earlier dreams.

These dreams were not the old "Indian Money" fantasies of the 1940s and 50s before the Federal claim was settled that we often heard expressed as: "Wait till the per capita payment, then we'll all be rich!" They are the dreams of our grandfathers of getting our tribal land back (even if we had to buy it back) after we lost it through federal chicanery, and the dreams of Good Health care and Medical programs from diagnosis to prescription drugs. These are now living, growing dreams made more real each year.

We could, and did, build a food and grocery industry, sports industry, financial industry, and provided an enviable college scholarship program and whole neighborhoods of tribally-owned housing for our elders and other Citizen Potawatomi in two states, child care programs, and death benefits.

Through all the years of these success, someone from the audience at each General Council would whine questioningly, "When are we going to get our *per capita payment*?", ignoring the fact that most tribes who squandered their opportunities in this manner will cease to exist because they no longer have the resources to create an economic base like that enjoyed by the Citizen Potawatomi. Would you sell your proud birthright for a onetime payment as many of the other tribes have done?

It has often been said, "Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it." When our grandmothers and grandfathers were forcibly removed from Illinois and Indiana, they were the wealthiest group of people in that area. What our forefathers did to survive and maintain our tribe and traditions needs to be respected, taught, and continued through the Seventh Fire.

The tradition of leadership is at issue here! When that tradition was looked at through European eyes in the early-contact years, they thought that Indian leaders were the ones who had the nicest clothes. They did not understand that the Indian leader's responsibility was, and is, to see to it that the People's needs are met, even if it meant pauperizing himself. In turn, it was and is the People's responsibility to see to it that the leader was and is taken care of the point that he could, and can, meet the People's needs.

That is **OUR RESPONSIBILITY** to our current leaders, if we are to uphold our Indian tradition's. Our current leadership has taken care of us in a wonderful manner. Our current "cradle-to-the-grave" programs and our traditions demand that we support our current leadership if we are to continue as a successful Indian nation in spite of jealousies and personal greed.

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