

Minnesota Sesquicentennial Statehood Weekend Remarks From Kevin Leecy, Chairman, Bois Forte Band of Chippewa

ST. PAUL, MN--(Marketwire - May 18, 2008) - Aanin. Hello.

I am Kevin Leecy, Tribal Chairman of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa Indians in northeast Minnesota.

I am also the Chairman of the Minnesota Indian Affairs Council, the official liaison between the state and Minnesota's 11 Indian tribes.

Just as there is no one kind of Minnesotan, there is no one type of American Indian. Each band, each individual is different. We share much, but we also have our differences of opinion, and the celebration of Minnesota's sesquicentennial is an example of that.

Some Indian people I've spoken to encouraged me to participate in today's event. They wanted a native voice speaking on our behalf. But others I talked with felt just as strongly that I should not come here today, because they believe that Indian people's part in this state's history has been overlooked.

Five hundred years ago, a ripple on the eastern seaboard grew into a tidal wave that moved across the country. It crested in Minnesota and crashed on the far shores of the Pacific, eventually overwhelming villages in Alaska and a kingdom in Hawaii.

The tidal wave left at least 20 million people dead in its path. It destroyed communities and altered the landscape, leaving small islands that we now call reservations.

But no one is telling that side of Minnesota's story. And that is the reason why some people are angry.

As the descendants of immigrants, you all bear a responsibility to tell your children not only where you came from and when you arrived here. You need to tell them what was done to the original people when you got here, and how things are now because of that.

We cannot change the past, but we can learn and teach and understand all parts of it: the good and the bad, the proud and the sad.

So today I challenge everyone -- the governor, the Legislature, the Department of Education -- to dig deeper and discover the whole story of Minnesota. Work with native communities to learn from us and ensure that our part of that story is told from our perspective, not just yours.

I also have a challenge for Minnesota business and local government leaders: let's move past the pain that scarred our shared history and concentrate on creating the kind of future we want for all Minnesotans.

Because when we all truly understand where we come from, we will all be better prepared to decide where we want to go and how we want to get there. A complete account of our collective history will not only illuminate our past; it will shine a light on the path ahead of us, so that we stumble less often as we move forward.

As we proceed into Minnesota's next 150 years, we can write a new history based on respect and collaboration.

A history of positive government-to-government relationships between the state and tribes and recognition of tribal sovereignty -- a right retained, not granted.

A history that recognizes all of our roles in making Minnesota what it is today.

Ever since the British and French first made contact with American Indians in Minnesota, the significance of our contributions -- from the land and resources of centuries past to our current economic and environmental initiatives -- has often been ignored or misunderstood. But the future doesn't have to be that way.

Yes, American Indian Minnesotans are different than other Minnesotans in some fundamental ways. This only means we have much more to offer one another.

But, we also have a lot in common, like hopes and dreams and plans for the future.

I firmly believe that by learning from each other and working together, we can create a history all Minnesotans can be proud of today and for the next seven generations.

Mii-gwetch -- Thank You.



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