

OUR JOURNEY - THE EVOLUTION OF THE ANISHINABEK

A Discussion Paper

by

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WHERE WE WERE, WHERE WE ARE NOW, WHERE ARE WE GOING

The guiding principles of Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinabe say we respect and honour the past, present and future.

WHERE WE WERE

History tells us that Anishinabek leaders “gathered in Council” to come up with the plans to protect, develop and have their people live the good life - Mino bi maadiziwin.

Look back to the organizing of their leaders to defend our rights.

Look back to when the Indian agent and the churches had so much control on our lives.

Look back to when residential schools tore families apart and left a legacy that is a stain on this country.

Look back on when our leadership fought off the assimilation of the 69 White paper, defeated federal Minister Nault’s First Nations Governance Act, that would have municipalized us; took our defence of our treaty rights to Great Britain to win protection of treaties with the Supreme Court Lord Denning case; fought to include protection of aboriginal and treaty rights under the Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution; pushed for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; and many more historic milestones along the journey.

Those leaders... Leaders like Bill Sault, Christie Bannon, Ben Wawia, several Hardys, have been Chiefs, Veronica Waboose, several from the Stone family have been Chiefs, several of the Michanos, several Kwissiwias, and a number of the present Northern Superior regional leaders have been strong champions.

Leaders with names like Pine, Boissoneau, Jones, Sayers, Bissaillion, Meawasige, Lewis, Commanda, Day, Johnson, Chiblow, Daybutch, Nignobe, Owl, Toulouse, Eskogogan, Nawegahbow, MacGregor, Paibomsai, McGraw, Abotossaway, Madahbee, Corbiere, Debassige, Hare, Antoine, Laford, Endenawas, Cada, Kells, Wakegijig, Manitowabi, Aguonie, Assinewai, Shawanda - leaders from the Lake Huron region.

Leaders with names Miskomon, DeLeary, Albert, Waddilove, Dolson, Nicholas, Rogers, Plain, Gray, Mason, Nadjiwan, Solomon, Root, Bressette, Shawkence and others from the Southwest region.

Leaders like Maness, Whiteduck, Knott, Whetung, Williams, Jacobs, Coppaway, Marsden, Smoke, Simpson, Gray, Edgars, Goose, Benedict, Noganosh, Stinson, McRae, Williams, King, Monague, Sandy, Jackson, Williams, King and more, from the Southeast region.

There are many more champions and I especially want to acknowledge the leaders, warriors, veterans that served in any of the military forces. These people were bold, they possessed **POLITICAL SAVVY**, they knew what was the political call that was needed for their community. They did not rely on Lawyers or Consultants to tell them about what they needed to do. We forget too often that are Anishinabek leaders were the impetus for the Declaration of our Nations, policing, gaming, childcare, health, backing off MNR harassment, the HST fight, and leading the Ontario region and often Nationally on many victories.

Look at what we have done---there has been so many successes because the leaders were bold, intelligent and visionaries. In 1995 these visionaries, these bold leaders, saw an opportunity to move our First Nations ahead in the area of governance. The spirit and intent was clear -- move cautiously in increments. In their wisdom they said start with only with 4 pillars. Elections, language and culture, citizenship and finally fiscal operations and management. These were the foundational elements to build onto. We learned from the Nishga Nation in B.C. who took on every governmental responsibility in one shot. In hindsight, they said they were not ready. They needed to build capacity and take it on incrementally.

Absolutely and definitively our leaders did not abandon protection of Inherent Rights, Sovereignty, Treaty and Aboriginal Rights, Fiduciary Obligations, Tax Immunity, Own Source Revenue, or most importantly the recognition of the paramountcy of the highest order of our government being at the First Nation level.

I've said it many times, these leaders had the **inspiration**, they directed the Chief's Committee on Governance, the staff, the organization to do the **perspiration** to develop what was needed. The outcome was the Anishinabek Nation Governance Agreement— a tool, a process to begin to move away from the Indian act—again incrementally. Next was the **implementation**. To begin to put in place the vision.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

The Chiefs at Grand Council directed to engage their First Nation communities to ratify the agreement.

It was challenging to say the least. The long duration of this process saw many Leadership changes - a flaw of the two-year Indian Act process. Presently 52% of Anishinabek Nation First Nation still use the Indian Act election process. 100% are involved with some form of provincial or federal agreements/ programs. Change will take time. We have some communities already moving on implementation. They are breaking the trail. They will use the tools and the

enhanced resources to enable them to plan development under their own ideas and control, advancing their jurisdiction.

I have heard for over 47 years, Leaders complaining of the status quo, limited to no resources to development, to build capacity, to build their community. Now we have a chance to do something about it. We need to make the citizens of our communities feel empowered, know they are being heard, and know that they have a say. We need to address the needs of our urban citizens.

We need to not listen to the lies, conspiracy theories, and myths from those that promote division and create confusion on our collective approach. When you ask them what their solution is, you hear nothing, or at the very least, worn out rhetoric that is repeated every time we try to make changes for the better. The direction of the process has come from you Chiefs. The ideas come from you and your citizens during the community engagements.

Let's revisit the 4 areas of the process:

- 1) **Leadership Selection** - most First Nations realize the present Indian Act election model does not create stability that is needed. What this current governance process does is create the opportunity for each First Nation to develop what works best for them. It will facilitate a discussion of our way of choosing Leaders, Qualifications, Terms of Office and empowering all our citizens to choose their government. The Indian Act creates non-participation.
- 2) **Language and Culture** - this goes to the heart of our identity as Anishinabek. **We are spiritual beings living a human existence. That's what makes us so unique.** Others are human beings trying to attain a spiritual existence. Hence, we run into the difference between religion and our **spirituality**. Our culture and language is so crucial to our thinking, our way of life. If you do not believe this, you will likely be absorbed into being like everyone else and lose your Anishinabek identity, language, culture, spirituality and sovereignty. The language and culture dimension of who we are is all part of our governance.
- 3) **Citizenship** - we know our families and we have developed a law on **E'Dbendaagzig - those who belong**. The Indian Act registration system is eliminating us in a slow genocide. It is up to us to determine who our citizens are. We cannot continue to allow the federal government to push us into extinction.
- 4) **Financial Accountability and Transparency** - the operations and management of First Nations funds has always been a contentious issue. This is where the breakdown in trust of our Leadership is most prevalent. Accusations of nepotism, unfairness, and no accountability plague the running of the business of operating a First Nation. This process creates opportunity to invest in citizen engagement to allow for review of draft budgets done up by Chief, Council and appropriate staff for the citizens to review, have a say, and help Chief and Council prioritize what the relevant needs are. This will allow

for a review at end of fiscal year to see how priorities and citizen expectations were met. This will rebuild trust. Presently Chief and Councils are underfunded and end up taking the criticism for not addressing community needs, when the real culprits are the federal underfunding and control by their terms and conditions. How the dollars are spent has to be the First Nations call, not Canada's.

In essence, these 4 areas are a start to take back control and have Indian Affairs back off. When ready, First Nations will move to take even more control of their operations in other sectors.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

We must stop playing **reactionary politics** to the next Federal or Provincial "process du Jour". They never stop coming up with what they think is best for us. It is up to us to look at what is best for us from our Anishinabek lens, not the bureaucrat's or parliamentarian's new idea of what they think will work, usually a failed, one-size-fits-all approach. They do not acknowledge the diversity and capacity of our First Nations. This agreement gives us the tools and the resources to implement our priorities. We will build-in the support mechanisms at the First Nation level and where appropriate, the support to the First Nations by a central entity when economies of scale, advocacy, and practical needs can be more readily addressed collaboratively by a collective body external to the First Nation that the First Nation directs.

We will have to give **high priority to capacity building** in order to do our business our way. Providing better services to our citizens will create trust. At the First Nation level, we need to look at the relevancy of the processes that have been developed over the years like Chi-Naaknigewin, Nation Building, E'Dbendaagzigig, Kinoomaadziwin, Koganaawsawin, Dodemaag system of governance, and all ideas relating to traditional governance.

What each community incorporates into their governance model will be up to each one. These are ideas for you to look at and see what is relevant and helpful to your community.

The enhanced resources can be used to complement processes already happening. You could use these dollars to strengthen your hand in land claims and use these resources to put real teeth into how you want to do treaty implementation. You could use these resources to complement any processes that will strengthen your community development. This is what governance is all about.

We need to develop short, medium, and long-term planning. Remember the saying: If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. We need to dream, have a vision of where we want to go. How we get there will take hard work but the outcomes will be ours, we will own our governance and our future. To get there our **Leaders need to lead**. Our citizens rely on the Leaders to do what is best for them. Our citizens are busy trying to make a living, look after their families, deal with social ills, deal with survival. During this long process, the question was asked at many forums: Where are our leaders?

Active Leadership will also build trust knowing that the Leadership is doing what they were elected to do. Importantly it is crucial that what is talked about at Chief's meetings needs to be transmitted to our citizens. To see what Leaders are doing; again, to build trust. Communication is so very important for getting to where we want to go.

We need a robust discussion about our relationships. How will our Anishinabek family operate when Leadership engages in change management and creating momentum on our relevant, priority needs. There are still relationships between those First Nations that proceed with the agreement and those that don't. How will we maintain our political affiliations, our political family, Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe?

As an example, at the current Grand Council, there are 2 meetings: the Corporate side and the historical governance side. Discussion needs to happen about the relationships with the central, collective governing body and the Grand Council.

It is crucial we maintain political discipline. It is crucial that no one gets left behind. It is crucial that we look to each other for support and best practices. This also demands some answers for our citizens who asked, "what's in it for me?" Some answers involve better service delivery to them by stable governance, stronger Leadership by building trust in how the business of the community is conducted, and empowering our people to be involved in how their funds are being prioritized for their use on relevant needs.

Transparency and accountability are to each other, not an outside government. Extra resources to begin to attack years of insufficient funding will allow for outstanding needs to be met. We will need to have many discussions on how to make things work better. How do we involve all our institutions to support the development of our First Nations?

Discussion is needed on who does what, what roles and responsibilities are done by whom. A visionary leader told me that one idea would be for Tribal Councils be delegated a role for capacity building or maybe it's an offshoot of our educational institutes. All these institutions have responsibility to support the First Nation.

We've heard time and time again the need for healing that is needed to advance our communities. We will not heal until we quit stabbing each other in the back. We set our goals and instead of working together we fight each other every step of the way and never get to the goal. We have to stop doing this. At the end of the day, this governance tool, this process, is to build on the promise, hope, and future of our communities.

**Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinabe
We are One Anishinabe Family.**