



Understanding Our Times

by Chief Boyd

What can Indian Country do, as Native Americans and as First Nations, to understand our times and respond to what is happening around us? Our quest for true sovereignty requires us to take the time to understand what is occurring. Burying one's head in the sand and not comprehending what is happening around us will cause us to lose the ground we have gained and fall the way of those who are not remembered, those who dishonored their ancestors by not carrying the spirit of our elders into this day and age. We can't stand by and watch with fear as the results of small economic declines in the Indian gaming industry affect profits. We need to look to the promised future without fear along with interceding and preventing further losses to our ability to make profits from Indian gaming. By not realizing what is going on with the economy, by not opening our eyes, we will not achieve our dreams and visions of true sovereignty.

The first question to ask ourselves is how are we responding to what is going on economically? Let's look at the history of the Native Nations when the Europeans came to our lands many years ago. We had a vast homeland, abundant natural resources, plentiful game for sustenance – we lived off the land and there was more than enough to sustain all of the tribes and their families. Those who came to our lands saw this abundance and wanted it as well. We had major battles over what was ours and our way of life. Today's times are very similar; some of our tribes have discovered the gaming industry and the abundant profits they reap from being involved in gaming have been a real blessing. Gaming is a high profit business which will allow some tribes to attain true sovereignty which only will only occur in Native America when we are financially independent. It is in the same light as the natural resources that the Great Spirit blessed us with a hundred or so years ago; we are now blessed with gaming income. The same type of battle our ancestors had with the Europeans is occurring now, due to the massive amount of spending our country is doing now in this troubled economy. Increased taxation is a threat to the profit we make from tribal gaming and it is seen as a source of income by many politicians. The small percentage drop in gaming revenue that occurred this year is not as serious a problem as the greed of some politicians. Are we prepared to fight the battle over gaming profits? Recognize that a fight is going on now, just as it did when our ancestors were fighting for their land, and be prepared to battle to keep our gaming incomes from becoming taxed so excessively that it affects our dream and vision of true sovereignty.

The second question we need to ask ourselves is how prepared are we to handle the future? What about 2011 and

2012? What are our future plans for increasing gaming revenues? We cannot look forward with fear. We need to start preparing for next year and the next year after that and have concrete plans on how maintain or increase profits for Indian gaming. We have been blessed by the Great Spirit and will be continually blessed, but we must look forward with faith, not fear.

The third question we need to ask ourselves is where we stand when a breach occurs in our sovereignty wall? This typically happens in the form of the greed of others. We can't sit back and look at the gap in the wall; we need to aggressively pursue filling any gap in the wall. We are warriors at heart who can fill the gaps, maintain our new found blessing and pass it on to our children and grandchildren.

And the fourth and most important question to ask ourselves is how are we maintaining our visions of financial independence (thus achieving true sovereignty) and our dreams of great futures for our tribes, our children and our grandchildren?

What we need to do now, in 2010, to prepare for the future is:

- Stay in tune to the Great Spirit; recognize he is the source of all of our blessings.
- Recognize your culture, but consecrate yourself to the Great Spirit.
- Humble yourself and don't grieve over other's success or greed.
- Remember we are ordinary Indians with an extraordinary Great Spirit!
- Do not be negligent about gaps, but stand in the gap for all of Indian Country.
- Do not become apathetic; keep your eyes on your vision for yourself and your tribe.
- Live with a grateful and responsive heart to others.

Practice these things and you will be an Indian or non-Indian who understands what is going on in our times, one that is sought by many, one who will assist the Great Spirit in blessing all of the tribes and nations of Indian Country. ♣

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