

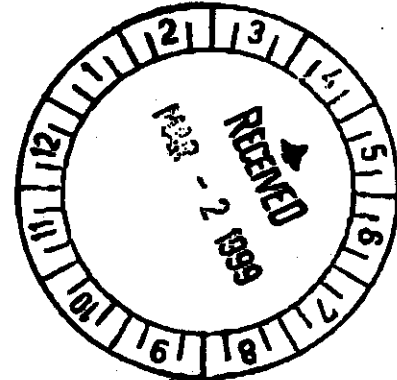


MILLE LACS BAND OF CHIPPEWA INDIANS

Executive Branch of Tribal Government

March 2, 1999

The Honorable Jesse Ventura
130 Capitol Building
75 Constitution Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55155



Dear Governor Ventura:

Before deciding to write this letter, I put a great deal of thought into how to approach you and how to make sure I afford you and your office the appropriate respect. I also have attempted to set up a meeting with you, but was informed that you do not speak to anyone affiliated with special interest groups. As a result, I am sending this letter in hopes that you will provide me and my People the attention and respect we deserve.

In a few months, perhaps even a few weeks or days, the United States Supreme Court will issue its historic ruling on the Mille Lacs Band's treaty rights case. Yet according to you, the court needn't bother.

Recently, you railed against my People and our long battle to secure the rights which were guaranteed by the U.S. government. Although your lack of knowledge on the subject was almost amusing (I don't know any Band members with 200-horsepower Yamaha engines and fish finders, as you claimed), your attitude was definitely not.

It seems American Indians have joined working single mothers and struggling students as the latest targets for your verbal body slam. But your rejection of our legal battle, our heritage, and our sovereignty seemed especially ill-timed. Your harsh words opened old wounds at the very time when we should be working together to heal them.

Throughout this court case, I have urged members of the Mille Lacs Band to carry themselves with dignity regardless of the court's decision. If we win, I have encouraged them not to gloat, and instead be mindful of the very real anguish that some of our non-Indian neighbors have experienced. And if we lose, I have asked them to respect the law, the rights of our neighbors, and of course, the land and waters that we all care about so much.

The Supreme Court's decision should mark the beginning of a new era of harmony for all Minnesotans, Indian and non-Indian alike. That is what you should be working for, instead of making comments intended to divide and inflame.

Governor Ventura
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You could start by learning something about my People. In the newspaper, you were quoted as asking, "What's the definition of a sovereign nation?" Here's the answer. A sovereign nation has the authority to govern its own territory and its own affairs. Sovereignty has helped the Mille Lacs Band do exactly what you say we should do - take care of our own. We have provided homes, education, health care, and opportunities to our People.

But sovereignty is not the same as self-sufficiency. To become totally self-sufficient - and that is our goal - the Mille Lacs Band and other American Indians must overcome centuries of neglect and out-right abuse. Please understand that sovereignty is not a gift from the federal government, and it is certainly not a gift from the state of Minnesota. Sovereignty is the inherent right of every American Indian tribal government. It is a reflection of the indisputable fact that we lived on this land and governed ourselves hundreds of years before Europeans arrived.

We will keep working toward our goals, and we hope that other Minnesotans who are trying to improve their lives hold tight to their dreams as well. We hope, too, that you learn to favor leadership over sound bites.

Sincerely,



Marge Anderson
Chief Executive