

Speech by John Morrin

Before I really talk about treaties, I'll tell you a little about a journey some of us began back in 1987 with questioning our constitutional amendments. And some of us said at that time, "why do we have to amend just one portion of the constitution?" We'll take a look at our constitution and write our own constitution. Do an overhaul. So the first time we approached a TEC meeting was April of 1987. I'd just like to pay homage to a lot of folks who aren't here. We started the journey some thirty years ago. There are those who have gone onto the spirit world. I'm sure they're here in spirit. And I can see some of you out in the crowd, some old guys that were there thirty years ago. And are still here with us, so we can begin this journey. We're not sure where we're going to go, how we're going to get there. But I think we have a lot of good people in this room, a lot of good minds, good hearts. Spirits that will guide us on the journey and also our spirit helpers that are always with us and they come sit with us. I'd like to pay homage to those folks who aren't here. We're having a chance to do what we envisioned some thirty years ago. In fact, one particular person I'd like to point out is one of my mentors, who was there at our first meeting. He showed up and went into that Holiday Inn in Duluth where the TEC was holding the meeting. And he showed up and we asked him, "Could you do a pipe ceremony?" And he did. He went and got his pipe. And he actually did a pipe ceremony in the parking lot of the Holiday Inn before we went into the TEC meeting, because we wanted the spirits to be with us. We wanted to try and start our journey in a good way. And I think we did. And I think that journey has brought us here today, to what we're doing today. His name was George Aubid. And when we get to new business, there's something about the TEC talking about blood quantum, about a lot of discrepancy with enrollments. So maybe under new business I can talk about that. But he was very instrumental, one who started a case here in Minnesota. State of Minnesota v. Zay Zah, his son George was sole heir. He understood that the land should never be taxed. But Zay Zah, it was taken for tax forfeiture in 1961. That's a whole other story about how Clearwater County thought they could tax this allotment. So George was there from the beginning and I think he gave us some good spiritual guidance. He was always there when we needed him. Back in 1984, I think when Mille Lacs took a look at their bylaws and I'm sure they talked to some Bureau people, talked to some attorneys. And I'm sure they realized, you know, we can develop any structure we want within our band bylaws and so they did. They worked out a

separation of powers that they said, "OK the chairman becomes the chief executive and overall the administration part of the government. And the secretary/treasurer and the three district representatives become the band assembly, basically the legislature. And the secretary/treasurer becomes the speaker of the band assembly. So they have their legislature. And George wrote the judicial branch of the government. So it was really based on tribal law, natural law. Also whatever ordinances/resolutions that the band assembly would pass, would become part of statute law, added on in place. And then they had a meeting on what they had done. And they called in all these officials – state, federal, county, from the communities. And George and Art Gahbow got together, put their heads together and wrote a speech for the event. So at first, Art gave it in our language, Anishinabemowin. He gave it in our language and then it was translated into English. It was fifteen pages. So I wouldn't say it was a speech, it was an oration. And when they started reading it in English, apparently, I wasn't there. But I heard that when they were reading in English, the state people and the federal people got up and left. I don't know if they were offended or what. But I got ahold of that interpretation and we got the translation and we read it. And I'll tell you, it was one of the most sovereign orations I have ever heard in my lifetime. And so George and I were going to be on a panel down at the Indian Center in Minneapolis, a panel on treaties and sovereignty. So I knew he was going to be there and I knew he wrote that oration. So when I got down there, I went to him and said, "George," I said, "you know, I got ahold of your oration. You wrote it right?" He smiled and nodded his head. And I said, "well for my presentation, I've taken maybe about two minutes out of that fifteen page oration." I said, "I would just like to quote the words for my talk on the panel." I said, "is that okay?" I wanted to show respect. I asked for permission and he said, "yah." So I tried to take out of the fifteen pages what I felt was some of the essence, such a long oration. But I wanted it to be only a couple of minutes. So you know you go much longer than that. So what I call it and I do have some copies of it out in the lobby in that green folder, if you want. So what I'll call it is wisdom. This is before gaming by the way. He gave this talk in January of 1985. He says, "We don't have thousands upon thousands of dollars. We do not have great mansions of beauty. We do not have priceless objects of art. We do not own the land upon which we live. We do not have the basic things of life, which we are told are necessary to better ourselves. We do not have the tools to be self-sufficient. But today I want to tell you that we do not need these things. What we do need however, is what we already have. But what we do need has been provided to us by the Great Spirit. We only need to be the

Anishinabeg from that time in the past. We need to realize who we really are and what we stand for. And we need to resist the temptation to be just like the white man. We need to be the Anishinabeg. We need to be as one again. We need to work again for the common good of all of us. We, the Anishinabeg are the human beings of this land. We have allowed others to come amongst us, coexist with us. We are the keepers of that which the Great Spirit has given us. That is, our language, our culture, our drum society, religion and most important of all, our traditional way of life. Be proud of the wall, of the protection that this wall provides. They cannot destroy it because the Great Spirit gave this and many other things to us. For this to be destroyed, only we can do it, by turning our backs on our language, our culture, our traditional drums and our religion. Only then can we lose and cease to exist as Anishinabeg. Be careful my friends. Be very careful because final integration of tribal governments into the political structure of the United States is just around the corner. They are calling for federal judicial review of federal acts and deeds, just like they had over the states. Be careful, my friends of the olive branch called the development of reservation economy. Remember what the object of the game is. Don't be enticed by the almighty dollar. Never allow them to forget the injustices, they allowed perpetrated upon you. My friends, remember the suffering of our Anishinabeg." I have to read that once in awhile because it keeps me grounded. It keeps me grounded in this whole idea that we are a sovereign people. Although, through the many court decisions that have been handed down they made up a lot of legal theories. 1823 Johnson v. McIntosh, they said we don't have title. They only have use and occupancy to our lands, when we were put there by the Creator. The decisions will say we're really not full-fledged, sovereign people. We're domestic dependent nations. This is embedded in legal law, statute law. And so what they've attempted to do is diminish our property law. But what treaties do, is they say we're a sovereign people. The United States government wanted our land, wanted more of our land and there was a lot of coercion in many of our treaties. We got lied to here in Grand Portage. Our people wanted that whole triangle for Grand Portage. And when it came out in English, the 1854 Treaty, it got cut off. That part, I forget how many acres. And when our treaty was read in English, and it was translated to our leadership (sic) in our language, they said, "We wanted that other land, we wanted that whole land." And so they started writing Washington, kept writing, writing. And it wasn't until 1982, when a realty officer came up to Grand Portage and fell in love with Grand Portage. And it's not hard to do, right? And he just loved this land, he loved the people, he said. And so he went back and did this bureaucratic

work and he got that restored in 1982 by Executive Order. So we now got our original reservation that our leadership intended, preserved for us till today. And so treaties say, we are a sovereign people. Even there have been Supreme Court cases like the kiatime (sp?) case that says Congress can extinguish any treaty they want to. Well I think we are in a position today that if they did, we have the ability, with resources, with lawyers – we could raise a lot of hell. I just don't think the political attitude, they were trying to do that. So we got our homelands. This is what we got. And we were freely, able to go around Minnesota, to the lakes, to the streams, to the woods, to hunt, to get our food and our clothing and our medicine. So that's what treaties mean. Treaties mean we are a distinct, sovereign people and nobody can take that away from us, because of what George was trying to say. No, only we can give it up. Nobody can take it from us, the United States government, Congress, nobody, if we are willing to fight. I talk to our young people about the treaty. And I say now we as adults, we are preserving this. Just as our ancestors set this aside for us, I said. And someday they are going to want this. They're going to want Grand Portage. They're trying to come in here and take it. And so we're preserving this for you. And we're willing to fight for it today. So when you're our age, when you get to be adults, you've got to be willing to stand up and fight, if they try to come and take this from you. Stand up and fight as Anishinabeg! We're a strong people. We wouldn't be here, if we weren't a strong people. So treaties (were) made. And I remember when I was a little boy living in South Minneapolis. There were only four of us Indian families living in this one particular block. So I'd go out and play with the kids, caught a lot of hell being Anishinabe. Being an Indian kid, being one of the few Indians in the neighborhood. And I would ask my ma, "Why do people stare at us in stores? Why do they look at us so mean? And why do these kids say mean things?" And all she said was because they don't know us. If they got to know us, if they got to know our history, our culture, we're a good people, a loving people, respectful, giving, sharing, helping. That's what it means to be a Chippewa. She didn't want me to speak the language because of her experience in boarding schools. She wanted me to succeed. She thought it was best that she wouldn't teach me the language. She still knew it. And so this is what this is all about. We got to keep teaching. We got to keep teaching ourselves about treaties. That's our strength as people, as Anishinabeg. Those treaties, we can't let them take that. So that's why, this is to educate people about us. As you know in most schools, they don't tell our history. It took us many years, but we fought hard to get an Indian course in Cook County High School. And now it's in our second year that Indian history is being taught in

Cook County. They don't just get American history and world history, that talks nothing about us. There are obstacles that this Manifest Destiny, that they're having, that's why treaties matter. Because it defines who we are. Our ancestors left us some beautiful areas. The Nelson Act screwed up a lot of reservations like Leech Lake and Fond du Lac. We gotta understand what happened there and understand that history of how we got messed up. How we ended up not able to get along. Not only in our own communities, but in other homelands and kinda divided up by colonization, by assimilation. These darn things that affect us, today yet. We're trying to develop our communities in a positive way. Treaties matter. They matter to us because of who we are. The treaties tell us we are a sovereign people. And we're never going to give that up. Never give nothing up. They've taken enough from us. We never gave it up. Even the Nelson Act was a lie. They never got approval of people in Grand Portage. Well they got a reservation, at least they can't prove it. I worked on a research program (2415 Land Claims) that constantly asked the Solicitor, show us. Boarding schools, mission schools, this led to outlaw our spiritual ways, in 1892 with rules and regulations. I'd say if somebody was out doing a pipe ceremony, he'd have to go out into the woods. Because he would have people who would molest him. People would be put six months in jail if they got caught doing our ceremonies, drum ceremonies, pipe ceremonies. If we had feasts, these were all outlawed by the United States government. Our chief system, Ogimaag hereditary, that was outlawed. So we gotta understand how we've been dismantled historically. And finally the Merriam report, where a man named John Collier was on this thing called American Indian Defense Fund. It's this group of wealthy white folks who were kind of sad because of the plight of Indian people. So they started this defense fund to figure out ways to hold the United States government a little more accountable. In 1928, they came out with the Merriam Report, which told that under the allotment process we had lost over ninety million acres of land within the boundaries of our reservations throughout the country. The atrocities of boarding schools, children were dying in those boarding schools. The health service was pits. Indian hospitals were (atrocious), people were dying in the hospitals. So we're going through this period. Finally so, John Collier gets elected (sic) as Commissioner of Indian Affairs and right away he developed what was called the Collier bill. And what this is, he goes back to those decisions like the Cherokee cases. But the Supreme Court says we're upholding distinct, political communities. We have the right to govern ourselves. And so he writes the bill that reaffirms that right of self-government. By the time he gets to Congress and they cut it up and it comes out the Howard Wheeler bill or the

together, they said, "This is what you get, take it or leave it. No, you're not getting anymore. This is it." So we were being dictated to, throughout the sixties, the seventies. And it wasn't until 1975 that a lot of things happened. There was an activism going on in the United States. Indians from universities, Indians wanted Indian Studies Departments. There was a lot of activism. The American Indian Movement got started in 1968, went to Washington in 1972 to take over the BIA, one of the most oppressive agencies within the United States government. They held it (BIA building) for a week or something like that, until they were given money and they left. Well, what this did was, they said, "Hey wait a minute. All these Indians can come to Washington and they go for a federal building, we gotta do something about this." Many tribal leaders were saying at the time, "this isn't working. We're not getting enough money and really we're not meeting the needs of our people with the money you're giving us." So the Self Determination Act (sic) of 1975, so we could sign these contracts with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And our leaders could go sit down with the Superintendent of the Minnesota Agency and develop the budget. But again the money was based upon what money they gave us. This is it and we couldn't get the money until the Bureau approved it. What they developed was 638 contracts. So we had one for education, we had one for forestry, we had one for health. They made you sign all of these contracts. All these different pots of money we were getting and if any of you ever filled out one of those reports, they were crazy. They're redundant, they make no sense. It's like you say, keep the money. It's too much. These reports are too much. You're putting too much on us for what little money we get. So it wasn't until a lot of people like Art Gahbow and some other tribal leaders around the country. They said, "Hey wait a minute!" They found out they got this petition. They allocated three billion dollars for tribes, let's say ten billion dollars for tribes. What they discovered is the damn Bureau is eating up seventy five cents to the dollar so only a quarter was given to Indian country. And so a lot of tribes started questioning that. (They were) saying now these contracts aren't working either. They still got too much control and it was at that time, 1990 when Congress passed the Self-Governance project. And tribes in the country, they didn't know it was called Self-Governance, where rather than get pots of money and sign all these different 638 contracts, we'll just give you block grants. So I think all of us, under our homelands are under self-governance, aren't we? You're all under self-governance, I think. I'm pretty sure we are, although they stopped the program now. They cut it off, where I think there's less than two hundred tribes that are allowed to be under self-governance. So anyway you get a pot of

money and then you get, you only get a pot of money that the central office of the BIA sets for you. And there's some formula on how they allocate money to the different tribes based on population, land. Some weird formula, but we never get enough for what we need to really meet the needs of our people. But it's called Self-Governance. But it's pretty much controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Office of Trust Responsibility. They created an office for those tribes, that when they had an opportunity to go for Self-Governance, they said, "no." They wanted to stay under the 638 contract. You ask, "Why?" They've been dominated. We've been not allowed to do for ourselves. We've been not allowed to do for centuries to make our own decisions for ourselves. So this is what this is all about. So now this time in history, that we're part of a new history. It's an old history, but now someday our grandchildren are gonna look back on these days and maybe a lot of them will know our names. Say yah! They were part of that constitutional convention that created a document that really meets the needs of our people. Really develops programming, that really deals with social problems that still exist in our communities. Some really good programs, but again it's got to come from our world view, our thinking. The way we should be looking at life. Like George said, "Anishinabeg, beautiful people, we're loving people, we're intelligent people, we're smart people." We can develop something for the future generations and we can develop something that we can also take depending upon what they're faced with. There's going to be some rugged things going down and hopefully this person sitting in Washington D.C. in the Executive Office, can be stopped someday. Because he's tearing us apart, cutting everything in Indian country and he's going crazy. He's anti-Indian gaming. And he's got a whole bunch of Republicans who have always been anti-Indian. Out of the termination era - Republicans who did that. Now I'm not sure if there's any Republican in the room, they don't like us. They don't want us to be sovereign, free people. The democrats, you can't always trust them either. But we can deal with that a little more. They listen to us a little more than Republicans do. I don't know what their problem is. But that's how they became the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe. I heard a story, I don't know if you know this one. This elder told me a story one time of how we got the name of Chippewa. There are many versions and many ways of how people say it. One elder from Lake of the Woods, was saying when the clans met, they went south to Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, up to the Turtle Mountains and other tribes went north to Michigami, up into Canada. They met at a place today called Grand Rapids, Manitoba. And when our people got there and we met up there, they saw the water there was a falls going into Lake Manitoba. And when they got through

the water, it was running so fast there was a white foam on the water. And people called this gichi pawepik. It describes the water running so fast, it's causing that white foam. So when the Jesuits came to (record our mineral wealth and) proselytize us, their agenda that they learn our language, learn our creation stories, learn our traditions. And they learned this story, gichi pawepik and so they write it down gichi pawepik. So that's how they hear it and that's how they write it. So then they just manipulate what they wrote down. So they take the g-i-p-i-k, you see another word according to Chippeway. We're called the Anishinabeg, Chippewayan. Then the English took hold, into this continent. Then they were called the United States of America, they called us Chippewa. That's not who we are. But it's a word that comes from our language, which refers to a sacred area. We always got to understand these words that they put on us. The intention was to forget us, who we really are. The whole intention was just to forget that. Whatever we do today, whatever we do in the future, we'll never forget who we really are. We're people who aren't going anywhere. Although the powers that be would like us to disappear. But we're not going to disappear. Hopefully we can create something, not only today and for the future. But create some kind of document. It's not going to happen overnight, it will take years. We also then got to have the patience to keep going. The spirits are with us, they're protecting us, keeping us strong. They're keeping our hearts and minds working together. That's how we're supposed to be functioning as a human being, our hearts and minds together. And it's hard to make mistakes when your heart and head are in the same place. And that's what keeps our spirit in balance. We're thinking, speaking with our heart and mind at the same time. Disconnected – all of that colonization and assimilation has disconnected that spirit our people have kept for us and we got to keep for our future generations. So a little bit of history of why treaties are important. The history of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and why it came to be and how we got to understand that we gotta undo something that is not meeting the needs of our people. We gotta understand where that came from, how it came about and it was forced on us. It was imposed on us, just like the Nelson Act was imposed on us, divided our homelands, what little we got left. But fortunately here in Grand Portage, gaming has given us an opportunity to buy back our own land that was set aside by Treaty of 1854. Millions of dollars that were spent to buy back land. Sad! Whatever document we develop, we got to make sure our land is protected, our water, our food is protected, our animal life is protected, our fish life, our plant life, all these things are protected for future generations. It would be easy to ask, "I'm not sure what I'm doing. This is the first time I've ever done something

like this in my life.” But I have trust in the people sitting in this room. The people that will come to future meetings, we have the minds and hearts to put things forward in a good way. That we can develop something that is really going to meet the needs of the future generations to protect our homelands that were set aside by treaty. Miigwetch.