

Over the past year, the Legislature has devoted a lot of time to helping keep our families safe and healthy. We have kept our masking ordinance in line with recommendations from our Department of Health and are asking all employees to be vaccinated. We amended the Healing to Wellness code with the hope that our relatives in the justice system will find success. These changes bring some immediate progress but there is so much more to do.



Photo 1. Vice President Karena Thundercloud spoke at UW Madison on the day they raised the Ho-Chunk Nation flag over Bascom Hall.

The Legislature modernized the Employment Relations Act which created a new leave system using paid time off (PTO) rather than annual and sick leaves. The new ERA also observes Founders Day on March 19th as an official Ho-Chunk Nation holiday.

The Residential Trust Leases have been amended so we could have the ability to provide the Native American Direct Loan (NADL) for veterans on Ho-Chunk Nation trust lands. Eligible veterans can use the NADL to buy, build, or improve a home on trust lands. The program is beneficial by providing a low-interest, 30-year fixed rate mortgage and often requires no down payment, no need for a private

mortgage insurance, and limits closing costs. The NADL allows a veteran to reuse the benefit more than once. To find more information or to initiate the loan process, a veteran can visit VA.gov.

A Flag Observation Ordinance was created to provide a standard for lowering all flags within the Nation to honor and respect the contributions of tribal veterans and individual tribal members. The ordinance gives the President the authority to order all flags to half-staff for four days (including the day of interment) following the death of a tribal member whether on active duty or veteran; or to lower Ho-Chunk Nation flags on the day of interment for individual tribal members who are not a veteran.

The Technology Resources Usage Act (formerly the Computer Usage Act) was amended through a comprehensive legislative workgroup review. Many of the changes addressed technological advancements and enhancements for protecting the Nation's data and systems. Another workgroup created the Social Media Usage Act to standardize the way the tribe interacts with the public through social media.

The Legislative Organization Act and Open Meetings Act were modified to address several issues, including the discontinuance of committees in favor of holding weekly legislative meetings to address concerns through the full legislature more efficiently and with the intent to allow tribal members to participate in the process.



Photo 2. Vice President Karena Thundercloud (D1) and Rep. Phyllis Smoke attend the Daycholah Camp renaming in Green Lake, WI.

Reps. Stephanie Begay (D2) and Sarah Lemieux (D3) are leading the Nation's involvement with the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (now including all relatives). They both serve on Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul's MMIW Task Force to study the issues and explore potential options to address those issues. The epidemic of missing and murder indigenous people has been widely acknowledged after the police brutality murders of minorities like George Floyd and following outcry over the national media hyperfocus on missing/murdered Caucasian women but perceived reverie for minority victims. The Task Force will provide a comprehensive report to understand, acknowledge, and provide a roadmap to eradicate the systemic deficiencies to adequately address causes such as human trafficking, gang indoctrination, domestic violence, racial bias in policing, and economic hardship.



Photo 3. Rep. Stephanie Begay (D2) and Rep. Sarah Lemieux (D3) attend the MMIW event at the State Capitol in Madison on May 5, 2022

May 5 has been designated as a day of observance for MMIW. This year, activists from across the state gathered both at the Capitol in Madison and in La Crosse. Similar gatherings occurred in Minneapolis and in major cities across the United States. The Nation applauds the commitment of the US Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in acknowledging, researching, and documenting the atrocities of Indian boarding schools across the United States.

The Gaming Commission had crucial responsibility for keeping the Nation's gaming facility pandemic guidelines in compliance with the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act – especially the provision regarding

protecting public health. They've also been instrumental in drafting regulations for the prospective sports betting. Sports betting was essentially legalized across the United States after a Supreme Court case cleared the way for states to regulate sport betting. Several tribes across the United States and a few in Wisconsin have negotiated gaming compacts and sent amendments to the BIA for approval. We are in the negotiation phase for our facilities to offer sport betting as well as several technical amendments and a provision allowing for gaming at a proposed site in Beloit.

The Beloit project was given final federal approval as the Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs ordered the agency to take the land into trust. This caps a decades-long effort to keep other tribes from reservation shopping in areas that would be detrimental to the Ho-Chunk Nation. The Bad River and St. Croix Chippewa Tribes first began steps to apply for trust status on that land in the late 1990s and early 2000s. After their initial application failed to garner federal approval, they vowed to reapply. The Nation stepped in with our own project following the two-part Secretarial determination process. The first part was completed in April of 2021 with Governor Evers' concurrence on the Part 292 (first part) of the process. The final approval came in May 2022 with the BIA announcing actions taking the land into trust. The Legislature is currently working with the Department of Business to complete the designs and begin construction on the project. The groundbreaking is expected in early 2023.

The economy of the tribe relies mostly upon gaming revenue. The several months-long shutdowns due to the pandemic has underscored the tribe's need for economic diversification. The Nation has been working on the economic diversification, including the partial capitalization of Twelve Clans, Inc. with several millions of dollars. District 4 representatives met with Mayor Curry from the Village of Lynwood in Illinois to discuss the future of the sports complex in the southern Chicago suburb. The complex is an investment that previous legislators made for a potential commercial gambling facility in Illinois. An application to the Illinois Gaming Board for a license in south Chicago was unsuccessful, but D4 tribal members maintain hope to make the property more viable for profit.



Photo 4. L-R: Rep. Paul Fox, Rep. Robert Pilot, Mayor Curry, Rep. Brianna Littlegeorge, Rep. Danielle DeLong

The Legislature submitted a grant proposal to the US Department of Commerce’s Economic Development Administration for the completion of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The Economic Development Director will work on the CEDS, which is a key component in establishing and maintaining a robust economic ecosystem by helping to build tribal infrastructure capacity. The CEDS will be a multi-year effort but will advance the visioning, goals, measurable objectives, and prioritized actions to promote economic success.

Vice President Karena Thundercloud was invited to participate in a national discussion on economic impacts in tribal communities. The uniqueness of the Nation, not having a contiguous reservation, hampers economic growth as we aim to improve each of our communities equally; but that distinction also empowers innovative solutions. VP Thundercloud said, “We are striving for an enduring fiscal resilience through economic diversification. We know that casinos alone cannot sustain the tribal economy. The success of our casinos have been a foundation that we must continue to build upon. We appreciate all of the hard work that our community has put into our gaming operations and we also recognize those that have put a lot of effort into our non-gaming enterprises. Our talented and dedicated employees created this momentum toward self-reliance and will always be our greatest resource.” Vice President Karena Thundercloud mentioned the success of BP Smokehouse in highlighting the entrepreneurial spirit of tribal members and ask the select committee members to consider expanding and emboldening programs that provide direct financial support to tribal member entrepreneurs!



Photo 5. Vice President Karena Thundercloud (D1) and Forest County Potawatomi Community Treasurer James Crawford were given a tour of the US Capitol by Rep. Bryan Steil (R-WI 1st CD)

Every session in the Wisconsin Legislature, several bills are introduced that disproportionately affect tribal parental rights. Over the past year, several Legislators along with legal counsel, defended against attacks on WICWA and tribal sovereignty, and also mounted efforts to successfully oppose efforts to terminate parental rights, expand to safe haven and create an unfair foster parent bill of rights. WICWA is a state law that enhances the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act and explains the state's responsibilities to tribes and tribal members. One bill would have involuntarily terminated the parental rights of incarcerated parents if they committed certain crimes or were imprisoned over a certain period of time, without allowing the parents' family to intervene. Safe Haven is a moniker for the law that allows new mothers to turn over a baby in the hospital, to police officers, or emergency medical technicians/paramedics without the knowledge or consent of the father and without ever having to say whether the baby is Indian or not. The foster parents bill of rights would have essentially granted foster parents more rights over the judicial process than the children's own parents. Reps. Stephanie Begay (D2), Kristin WhiteEagle (D2), and Sarah Lemieux (D3) led the lobbying efforts and continue to remain vigilant for bills affecting tribal members' rights.



Photo 6. Rep. Kristin WhiteEagle and Attorney General Scott Seifert provide testimony at the State Capitol.

The Legislature adopted resolutions opposing the Enbridge pipeline relocation efforts and the delisting of the grey wolf. This year, the Wisconsin Supreme Court sided with the Ho-Chunk Nation in a lawsuit brought by Meteor Timber in hopes that they could obtain a permit to destroy wetlands and create a

frac sand operation. We are committed to protecting the environment especially in our tribal homelands.

Each year, the Nation's government and enterprises go through a budget process. The past two years have been challenging with the volatility of the economy, causing the Legislature to adopt amendments to the Appropriations and Budget Process Act to allow for continuing resolutions, or temporary budgets. This year, we've asked all branches and departments to seek grant funding to fill gaps and reduce the Nation's reliance on gaming revenue for essential programs and services. Our goal is to create a level of sustainability to maintain the level of services that tribal members need.

For example, Rep. Danielle DeLong (D4) has been working the State of Minnesota Board on Tribal Aging for grants and services available to tribal elders residing in Minnesota. Since the Twin Cities Branch Office has been without an HCN TAU representative. Rep. DeLong coordinated with Mr. Leonard Geshick to advocate on our tribal elders' behalf. In March, the state of Minnesota awarded \$40,000 to the Nation to hire an elder community worker to continue services to the area tribal elders. Rep. DeLong steered the contract from Minnesota's legal counsel through the Nation's TAU and DOJ and through our legislative process. This funding will pay for a TAU worker from June 30, 2022 through December 31, 2022 and is a prime example of the opportunities that the Legislature hopes all departments will seek out for all tribal members.

The Legislature thanks you for the trust and confidence that you have in each of the district representatives to keep our Nation on the right track. Have a great General Council!