

ECONOMIC DEVELOPER OF THE YEAR  
AWARD — SEPTEMBER 28, 2000  
*Speech to the CANDO National Economic  
Development Conference, Yellowknife, N.W.T.*

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Chief Clarence Louie

I'd like to thank CANDO for all of its past and present work to bring Native people back into the economy of their region — their territory — their lands.

I'd also like to give my recognition and appreciation to the sponsors and our host organization — The Denendeh Development Corporation. I am privileged to be on the ancestral lands of your people.

I want to thank all of you for taking the time out of your busy schedules to be at the 7th Annual CANDO National Conference.

#### **Importance of Economic Development**

I was asked to give a short presentation on the Osoyoos Indian Band and its business initiatives. Before I can say anything about what we have done in the area of business, I have to say a few things about the importance of business growth on every reserve in this country and the fact that Aboriginal people must develop business-minded people that can compete in the real business world.

For thousands of years Native people were part of the local and regional economy. Yet, over the last 100 years Natives have been

marginalized and denied their right to provide for themselves and their families.

Social ills need to be addressed but they will never be overcome unless there is a strong, viable business program — designed by business people like yourselves. As past National Chief Ovide Mercredi stated, "It is the economic horse that pulls the social cart."

Once you become "healed," welfare is not an option. If education is important to your people — where will your educated people work? No one goes to school or gets training so they can be on welfare. The success of your people is directly tied to how your people participate in the economy of your area. As I have stated your social programs need the support of a strong business sector.

#### **The Osoyoos Indian Band Experience**

In 1994, our Band was in the same situation as most Bands in Canada. Federal transfer dollars exceeded the Bands self-generated revenue. Today (six years later), the Osoyoos Indian Band's self-generated revenue is seven times more than the Federal transfer amount. Every Aboriginal community needs to create more self-generated revenue. The fact is social costs accel-

erate every year. Therefore on the other side of the ledger self-generated revenue must also increase.

Now I can understand and sympathize with many Native communities who cannot contribute to their own programs and services because of their lack of economic development. In many instances the geographic location of the community does not provide them with the opportunity to get involved in business growth. With one in three bands in financial trouble, I can fully understand when someone cannot afford to give.

However, through my travels, I know and I have seen a few bands that should be able to contribute to their social and cultural needs, yet, their priorities are elsewhere.

It is through the efforts of the leadership of the Native communities, the elders, the women, the youth, the chiefs and councils and organizations like CANDO, that Native people are once again getting involved and becoming major players in their economy.

### **We Must Leave Behind Our Dependency on Government Programs**

We, as Aboriginal people have to change our mindset from operating Grant Economies, that are dictated by government procedures and policies, to developing and operating revenue generating, job creating companies. Therefore, Natives need to be developing business minded people: revenue-creating people.

As one professor put it: "Being under the control of D.I.A. for generations Natives have learned how to spend money—have become dependent on programs—but few know how to make money. Spending money and making money are two totally different things."

You people are some of the most important people in Indian Country. Why? Because if Native business opportunities are going to succeed—it will take people that are focused and committed to business development like you and the organizations that you represent.

### **Social Programs Have Been Taking Priority over Economic Programs**

Over the last few decades, if you asked for all the Band staff who worked in the social areas and put them around your boardroom tables—all the seats would be filled—then if you asked

the next day for all of your business managers to come and sit at the same board room—only a few, if any, seats would be filled.

There are countless meetings and workshops on social issues—in most bands the biggest budgets and staffing is spent on social programs. I have often wondered why Natives don't spend more time and effort on business development—especially when you consider that economic development is so important to the future of all Aboriginal societies.

According to a major conclusion from the Harvard Research Project on Native American Economic Development, which began in 1984, "Research has proven that when a tribe takes responsibility for what happens economically they have started down the path to improving all social conditions."

### **Social Programs Are Being Funded by the Economic Successes of Our Businesses**

Now I fully realize and understand why we have more people working on social problems. I don't need to go through the First Nations horrible past in this country at the control of Federal government bureaucrats. Past government policies have caused social malfunctions in Native societies.

Our boardrooms and our meetings and our gatherings need to be filled with business minded people, entrepreneurs, executives, and business advisors. It doesn't matter if they are native or non-native. There is only one way to do business and that is the right way with highly skilled people with proven business skills, abilities and experience.

There has to come a time when the healing of our people is over and greater resources can be put towards people that want to be successful and create income and a productive future for their people.

Past National Chief Ovide Mercredi never spoke truer words when he said: "It is hard work that produces a healthy person." Yes, I agree that today many of our people need those social service programs, but even those social programs are handicapped because of lack of funding. The success or failure of our social programs has a direct effect on our economic future.

At the Osoyoos Indian Band, I don't want any of our social programs, education, health, recreation, elders programs and especially our

language and culture programs to be dependent on government grants.

None of our social programs should be operating with half a heartbeat because of insufficient funding—social programs need proper funding to operate. At the Osoyoos Indian Band, it's because of our economic development; our land developments, our partnerships, and our Band enterprises, that none of our social programs need suffer a half-hearted attempt.

### **A Commitment to Socio-Economic Development: Striking a Balance**

I can stomach a bad quarter or a bad year in business—as long as our managers and workers tried their best and our social and economic objectives are being met.

We all know business has its peaks and valleys. But I cannot defend, justify, or make allowance for reducing, or taking dollars away from, or not providing additional dollars to, education programs. I do not want to tell a student: “No, we cannot fund you this term”. I do not want to tell someone who needs medical help that those programs are no longer funded because of Medical Services cutbacks. Looking after and getting ourselves out of these social problems is one of the main reasons we are in business. We call it socio-economic development.

At the Osoyoos Indian Band, a portion of our business profits from each company goes towards social programs—through our economic development we fund:

- Patient Travel
- Adult in Home Care
- Medication Fund—Where Medical Services has cutback, our business contributions step in.
- Education Fund—A key element of self sufficiency is a highly skilled aboriginal workforce. Where education funding has been cutback our business corporation steps in. No member at Osoyoos Band who wants to go to school or wants training is denied.—our business corporation supplements our students at rates higher than the D.I.A. “bread and water” subsistence levels. Education is the battleground.
- Recreation—sports is very important in the development and health of your people—this past year we built a fully equipped first-rate gym. We are the only Band in our area that provides recreation dollars to each and every

one of our people. Economic Development contributes a portion of the fees for any recreation program a member wants to take on or off the reserve. This past year we spent \$70,000.00 on new playground equipment. It was the first time our kids were heard bragging to Non-Native kids in the public school that the best playgrounds were on the REZ. We want them to know that what we have on the REZ is better.

- Youth—our businesses provide youth employment. Every youth on the Osoyoos Indian Band is given a chance for summer employment. There is an ongoing need for youth development workshops. Educational and recreational events are provided for—What is desperately needed in every aboriginal community is “**youth entrepreneurial training**”. Encouraging youth to aspire to become managers and think about careers that generate money is a primary objective of the current leadership.
- The Elders—after all they have gone through at the hands of the Federal/provincial Governments—little or no funding is available for elders programs from government sources. Where the Federal government neglects our elders, the Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation steps in. We provide travel dollars for our elders to participate in the events of their choosing. This past year—and it is something our council is extremely proud of—we initiated through our economic development a monthly contribution to senior pensions. It saddens me when I hear that elders from other places get little or nothing from their Band Councils.

### **Preserving Our Past by Strengthening Our Future**

At the Osoyoos Indian Band we are in business to preserve our past by strengthening our future. We provide more dollars for language and culture programs than anyone else in our territory. So for you, I say be proud of any dollars your organization puts toward the preservation of language and culture. We need to bring back a working culture. That is why we are in business. Do not ever depend on government grants to provide the necessary language and culture programs needed by your people.

If anything is your responsibility then it is this. Native people should never be in business

at the expense of their language and culture. Your economic success must not result in the loss of your heritage. If making money is more important than your aboriginal heritage then you have compromised your identity as an aboriginal corporation.

Native people 'where possible' have an inherent obligation to give back to the environment. A portion of your business earnings must go to support environmental programs. At Osoyoos, we participate in water quality programs and fund Fish and wildlife enhancement. We are also protecting one of the most endangered habitats in all of Canada, the South Okanagan 'desert lands.' Many red and blue listed species last major habitat is on the Osoyoos Indian Reserve.

Every year commercial and residential developers approach us about leasing or joint venturing the development of these desert lands. Our people have thought more about their heritage and standing up for the endangered species than the almighty dollar. As such, we are setting aside 890 acres of prime real estate for ecological purposes: a 'pocket desert'.

### **Facing the Challenges in Your Own Backyard**

As a chief and a businessman, I take it upon myself to spend the vast majority of my time at home. For the important Tribal and National issues I give my support to our Tribal Council and staff. I attend every local Tribal Council meeting, but I seldom travel outside of southern BC. In 14 years I have left BC five times: this trip being the fifth.

I went to Ottawa a few months ago—you know it cost over \$1,000.00, for that trip. That \$1,000.00 could easily have been given to an elders trip or a youth trip or paid for some health program. I hear it and I see the many thousands of dollars First Nations spend on council and band staff travel.

Some travel is a necessary part of doing business. Yet, as important as the Provincial and National issues are, it is necessary to focus and concentrate on your own back yard first. Be very selective in travelling. If just a portion of those dollars could be spent on the programs and services that your people need—some of those social ills could be addressed.

### **Giving Back to the Community**

This past May I participated in the Governor General's study tour on business development in Canada. I was one out of 200 business people from across Canada selected for a 3-week business tour. The theme of the tour was "How can business give back to the community".

I have previously given the example of how the Osoyoos Indian Band has given back to its own community. I further believe that in one shape or another most Aboriginal corporations do give back to their community. Being in business for aboriginal corporations is far more than jobs and revenue: it means supporting the very core of what makes up your community, i.e., to re-invest some of those profits back in your people, programs and services in order to improve the quality of life and retaining of your heritage.

A few years ago, I was appointed to the B.C. Native Economic Development Advisory Board (NEDAB). A few weeks ago I was nominated to the national Aboriginal Business Canada Board. At Osoyoos, we know of the importance of developing Aboriginal businesses and when possible I carry that message to all levels of government.

### **Business on the Osoyoos Indian Band: A Corporate Profile**

At this event, I was asked to speak of the business initiatives of the Osoyoos Indian Band. However, after seeing and reading about the despair and unemployment that currently exists on many First Nations reserves I have come to **deliver a socio-economic message** rather than to boast about our accomplishments or give details about our varied business enterprises. Our brochures, booth, video, and web site provide the details. However, I will quickly give a corporate profile of our eight businesses, the majority of which were developed and expanded upon within the past 10 years:

- Nk'Mip Vineyards—250 acres of premium wine grapes. The largest privately owned vineyard in Canada.
- Nk'Mip Campground—biggest campground in the South Okanagan—251 sites.
- Nk'Mip Forestry—30,000 cubic metres of logging each year and a silviculture component.
- Inkameep Construction Company—Providing both on- and off-reserve residential and commercial construction.

- OIB Holdings — residential and agriculture leasing of over 1050 acres.
- Nk'Mip Canyon Desert Golf course — This year we embarked on a \$3.1 million dollar golf course expansion — going from a 9-hole course to a 18-hole championship course with a new club house).
- Oliver Read Mix — This past year the Osoyoos Indian Band accomplished its first off reserve business acquisition by purchasing — with no government grant, the local cement company in Oliver. It is rare that First Nations venture off the reserve for business development yet **in order to** maximize your business opportunities First Nation business scope has to focus beyond their reserve boundaries and seize business opportunities wherever they exist.
- Saw Mill — On August 1st 2000 a dry log sawmill was set up in partnership with a U.S. based company. It will process 25,000 cubic metres of wood annually with a gross revenue of \$2.5 million.
- Nk'Mip R.V. Park — next month we will embark upon our latest business venture — a \$1.3 million — 72 sites fully serviced R.V. park.

In addition:

This October we will begin the development of a 150 modular home park at the cost of \$3 million. This project will add approximately \$600,000 each year to our Development Corporation revenue.

Inkameep Cellars: This past July a letter of intent for a joint venture winery with Vincor International (North America's 4th largest

winery) was initiated. At this moment, we are halfway through the market and feasibility study of North America's first Aboriginal-owned winery.

Native Interpretive Cultural Centre: A three- to five-million dollar proposal to exhibit the desert, the plants and animals of the desert and the rich heritage of the Okanagan people.

### Summary

Yes. We may be one of the few First Nations with the capacity to be fully employed. We have accomplished much — but as business people well know the toughest part of being in business is staying in business and we still have a lot of challenges and learning to do.

My message today is of the vital importance: creating business people and a business attitude. This will allow for Aboriginal entrepreneurs to compete in the business world. This message is more meaningful than the particulars of the Osoyoos Indian Band Development Corporation. I send out the welcome to anyone if you're ever in the South Okanagan come visit our operations — be our guest!!

I want to leave you with the call to action that I believe CANDO and every other Aboriginal business corporation and Aboriginal business person stands for: Pursue economic growth and maximize business opportunities while maintaining Pride of Heritage." We as aboriginal people should only be satisfied with **the best!** In closing, tonight and in the future, its up to people like you in this room to make Aboriginal economic business growth a reality. **"Go out and make some deals."**