

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

NAWA AKITARU, for the 2021 Annual Report I extend best wishes to everyone on behalf of the Pawnee Business Council. Over the past year, the resilient Pawnee People saw illness, loss, and hardship because of the pandemic. In this trying time, the Nation's government worked hard to combat disease, face challenges of the hour, and undertake historic initiatives.

In 2021 the second year of the pandemic brought one surge after another. According to President Biden, these were two of the hardest years America has ever faced. In the Pawnee Nation, difficult conditions prevailed in the 1st and 2nd Quarters. The New Year started in a Dark Winter when the Pawnee Nation faced the zenith of coronavirus infection amid a dire economic slump caused by the pandemic. During this crisis, the short-handed government carried on. Vital duties could not be left undone, despite a reduced workforce, salary reductions, and a four-day workweek.

By May the government rebounded to full strength. Thanks to vaccinations, improved gaming revenues, and the influx of significant ARPA funding, we saw light at the end of the tunnel. Pawnee ceremonial life resumed in the summer. That uplifted the Nation. It was good to hear the drum once again. But September brought the Delta variant surge into the community, followed by the Omnicom surge in December.

To face these challenges, FY 2021 began with a balanced budget that put our Nation on a solid fiscal foundation. Soon after we received ARPA funding, PBC deployed a robust multi-faceted set of programs to assist the People, encourage vaccinations, provide vital services, and strengthen the government. Here are some highlights:

1. Assisting the People: In June, PBC initiated the largest assistance program ever done by the Nation. We appropriated over nine million dollars to provide \$2,500 for every citizen harmed by the pandemic. Additional aid rolled out the rest of the year.
2. Vaccinations: To prevent infection, our elders, full-bloods, language speakers, ceremonial and traditional leaders were vaccinated first. By year's end, 86% of our Tribal employees were fully vaccinated. We asked everyone to get vaccinated.
3. Tribal Operations: To keep vital services going, we repaired and rebuilt the dilapidated IT system. By year's end, the system was humming.
4. Strengthening the Economy: To strengthen our hard-hit gaming industry, the PBC helped resolve chronic conflict between the regulatory and operation sides of the industry. That peacemaking process included mandates to promote professionalism throughout the government. And PBC explored legislative ways to improve the gaming framework and reorganize the industry with new laws in 2022.

5. Food Sovereignty: PBC doubled the land base on or near the Pawnee Reservation. Over 1,150 acres were acquired for Tribal cattle operations to provide beef for the Household Assistance Program. In addition, greenhouse construction continued, Tribal pastures were improved, and Building One was leased to the Pawnee Seed Preservation Society. These historic efforts propel our Nation into agriculture.
6. Intergovernmental Affairs: PBC enacted a Consultation Statute to require federal/state agencies to follow Tribal protocols when consulting the Nation on matters affecting vital legal rights or interests. This law is being followed by EPA.
7. Strengthening Tribal government: The Pawnee Evening Star Fund was created. This nonprofit will raise funds for Tribal programs and projects from foundations and donors. This new source of funding will supplement our federally funded activity. In 2021 PESF board members helped raise \$250,000 for Tribal projects.
8. Entering the Medical Field: (1) PBC approved a plan to fund, finance, build, staff, and open a 21-bed in-patient/out-patient Behavioral Health Center in two years; (2) negotiations on a self-governance Compact for IHS programs neared completion.
9. Environmental Protection: (1) PBC successfully advocated that EPA withdraw and reconsider its SAFETEA decision of 2020 that granted state authority to run EPA programs in "Indian Country;" (2) a work group was formed to ensure Tribal oil & gas laws are followed by federal agencies.
10. Cultural Preservation: The CRD initiated new projects: (1) a Research Library to house all books and material ever written about Pawnees; and (2) an On-line Archive to house Pawnee historical and cultural material obtained from 16 archives.

I thank the Pawnee People for my opportunity to serve. In this testing time, I am blessed to work alongside talented PBC members. I appreciate their leadership, teamwork, and hard work. We are indebted to our hardworking staff. They showed bravery in the face of adversity--not a week went by without some of these heroes going into quarantine with illness. I thank the Nation's committees for working tirelessly on diverse governance matters. They drilled down into complex issues and offered sound advice to the PBC. I thank the Attorney General for rendering legal assistance on diverse matters--sound legal advice helped the government navigate complex issues. All in all, our Nation was in good hands. Together we faced difficulty in 2021, persevered, and remain undaunted.

PBC looks forward to 2022 with confidence. With well-laid plans, we can take the High Road to overcome the pandemic and be a stronger Nation at the end of the day. May Atius bless, protect, and guide our Nation. Nawairi.

Walter R. Echo-Hawk, President.

