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Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Istchee)  
Grand Conseil des Cris (Eeyou Istchee)

ΔΔ/ΔΑΑΐΐ ΓΑΔΑΓΛ°  
Cree Nation Government  
Gouvernement de la Nation Crie



C. N. G.  
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est. 1978

## **SPEAKING NOTES**

**GRAND CHIEF DR. ABEL BOSUM**

**CREE NATION YOUTH COUNCIL'S INSPIRE HOPE**

**CONFERENCE:**

**"STOP EXISTING & START LIVING"**

**OUJÉ-BOUGOUMOU, EYYOU ISTCHEE**

**MARCH 24, 2019**

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Good morning to the youth of Eeyou Istchee.

As always, it is very special for me to have the opportunity to speak directly with our Cree youth. We have always said, and it has been repeated constantly, that the youth represent the future of our Cree Nation.

There are many things that we have repeated over the last few years that you may actually be getting tired of hearing so I am not going to spend a lot of time saying those things again.

You have been told that the future of the Cree Nation rests on your shoulders. You have been told that it is up to you to realize the long-held vision of the Cree Nation to become “masters of our own homes...masters of our destiny”, and that it is up to you to take advantage of the clear opportunity before us of becoming the major economic and political force within Eeyou Istchee.

You have been told that, in order to fulfill this vision and take advantage of the opportunities before us, the youth of Eeyou Istchee must seriously take to heart the imperative of capacity-building....to acquire the skills, knowledge and training for us to genuinely be able to manage and control what happens within Eeyou Istchee.....that you must develop the professional skills, the managerial skills, and the technical skills to grab hold of the wealth of employment opportunities that are now available to us, and that will continue to become available throughout Eeyou Istchee. You have been asked to take up this challenge with the same sense of mission, the same sense of purpose and the same sense of commitment that an earlier generation of Cree leaders showed in negotiating our Treaty, defending our Treaty and putting into place agreements that have allowed us the possibility of recreating our original sovereignty in a contemporary context, while at the same time, reversing our colonial history and decolonizing every aspect of the lives of our communities and our Nation. You have been asked to become fearless pioneers and to

make a contribution to the development of our very special Indigenous Nation.

While all of this is true, and while all of this remains our Nation's priority, and while this will always be my personal priority, I don't want to dwell on these messages. Today, I will not be lecturing you about what you should be doing with your lives and how you should orient your lives. Instead, what I would like to do today is to help you to kick-start your own personal process, your exploration of your own journey and your own reflections about what the future could look like for you and how that future could unfold for you.

What I would like each and every one of you to do is to engage in an exercise of the imagination. I would like you to imagine what a vibrant and healthy Indigenous Nation could look like.... imagine an Indigenous Nation which has struggled to decolonize every aspect of community life and imagine an Indigenous Nation which is proud, confident and in control of what happens within its

traditional territory. Imagine an Indigenous Nation which has preserved its language and its culture and sits as equals with non-Indigenous governments to discuss issues of common interest. Imagine an Indigenous Nation which is no longer in a state of dependency on non-Indigenous governments, and no longer in a state of dependency on non-Indigenous professionals of all kinds whether teachers, lawyers, accountants, judges, doctors, nurses, psychologists, therapists, consultants, engineers, geologists, forestry engineers and technicians, and business analysts and business professionals.....and the list of course goes on and on. Imagine an Indigenous Nation where all of the important role models look like familiar faces and are from our own communities.... imagine an Indigenous Nation that is looked upon as a model to the world and imagine an Indigenous Nation that feels a sense of responsibility toward contributing to the emancipation and liberation of Indigenous peoples around the world.

Once you have that big picture in your minds, I would like you to think and to imagine what that could mean for you personally? I would like you to imagine how you, personally, could fit into that kind of picture. What could be your role in that kind of Indigenous Nation? What special talent, what special interest, what special personal vision do you have in that kind of scenario?

Part of this big picture is, in fact, a reality for the Cree Nation, and some of this big picture remains a dream and a vision. But, it is precisely the kind of vision that is within our grasp, and to realize it will require your reflection, your imagination, your dreams, your energy and your determination.

It is part of our Cree culture that we tend to teach more by example and by stories than by instruction, and where there are instructions they are embedded in the course of carrying out activities in the moment. Our teaching is in the moment, it is grounded in the reality of our lives, and it is immediate and tangible—even our stories. So, in keeping with this Cree cultural

tradition I would like to share with you a little bit about my late son, Nathaniel, and how he lived his life. You may take from his story what resonates with you and reflect on this in a way that makes sense for you and for your own life, and decide for yourselves whether it has any meaning for you as you are figuring out your own life's journey.

When he was very young, Nathaniel loved all kinds of sports. Both his brothers and I played hockey and that influenced him to play hockey himself. But that quickly changed. On his fifth birthday, we bought him his first motocross bike and he developed a true love of the sport. At a young age he was constantly leaving home and family to train in Florida during the winters to improve his skills and his fitness. With all the sacrifices he and our family made, he quickly developed as a rider and started winning championships in the amateur classes making him a future prospect in the eyes of many pro motocross teams.

At the age of fifteen he became one of the youngest riders to turn pro in Canada. In 2007 Nathaniel attended the Canadian national circuit in the MX-2 class and finished sixteenth overall among the best Canadian and American racers. He even signed a contract with a racing team in the States to race snow-cross in the World Snow-cross Association in the United States. He finished second overall in the sport class amongst the best in the world.

In 2008, he continued his career in the Canadian Motocross Nationals but could not compete after three rounds because of a broken ankle leaving him to sit out the whole year. In the winter of 2008, Nathaniel decided to pursue another career other than being a professional athlete. Believing that having an education was more important than racing, Nathaniel applied for college at John Abbott in Montreal and was enrolled in the Business Administration program.

On December 2, 2008 Nathaniel lost his grandmother, Winnie, to whom he was very close. She was around to see Nathaniel grow

into a professional athlete. But with all the emotions of losing someone so close, Nathaniel decided to go home to Ouje-Bougoumou and spend time with his family to recover from his loss. While he was back home he decided to work to change his mindset from the racing career that reminded him of his late grandmother. He set out on a different path by becoming a Minor Sports Coordinator in Ouje-Bougoumou and he helped motivate young kids to pursue their own dreams in their own sports.

In the summer of 2011 after two years away from racing Nathaniel bought himself a bike and started riding again. He was quickly reminded of how much he loved the sport he had left and decided to give it another shot. He also decided to go back to school and enrolled in the Business Marketing Program at Dawson College. While in school Nathaniel set his goals high, training twice as hard as anyone else, and losing sixty pounds before the summer.

After dominating a few regional events he turned his focus to competing in the Canadian Nationals. At twenty-three years of age Nathaniel was the only Indigenous person to compete at a professional level in his sport and he continued to have the drive to achieve his dream of becoming a Canadian National Champion.

In his work life, Nathaniel was an innovator and an entrepreneur. Not too long before he passed away, he established his own firm focused on enhancing the capacity-building efforts of his Cree Nation. His firm coordinated training courses focused on the mining industry to ensure that qualified Cree people could competently take on the jobs available in the numerous mines within the Cree traditional territory.

I have always been extremely proud of Nathaniel as a parent, and also, I have been inspired as Grand Chief of the Cree Nation by Nathaniel's achievements. He took to heart everything that the Cree Nation leadership has asked of our youth. He did it professionally, while still pursuing his other passions. In

everything he undertook... he lived fully. He was well-rounded, having a rewarding professional life and a rich personal life.

It is probably for these reasons, and as a tribute to Nathaniel, that the organizers of this conference have chosen the theme “Stop Existing and Start Living”. This, of course, is a slogan that Nathaniel himself adopted, and this is the way he lived his life... with purpose, with passion, with focused energy, with humility, and always with fun. He showed that it is possible—all at the same time—to be passionate about fulfilling his personal professional goals, fulfilling our Nation’s vision, pursuing personal passions, having a fulfilling personal life, remaining deeply connected and committed to family, profoundly committed to our Cree culture and traditions, and appreciating the importance of being a decent human being along the way.

Nathaniel found his purpose and he found his way of organizing his life around his purpose and around his passions. He found for himself the reasons to get out of bed every morning.

So, with everything I have shared with you today, my hope is that I have given you something to reflect on and think about as you continue to discover your own purpose and as you continue your own journeys to see more clearly the path before you.

Please choose wisely and choose well. And please know that your Nation is committed to helping you in any and all ways that we can. We are there for you.

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